

HESHAM AL-AWADI

MUHAMMAD

HOW HE CAN MAKE YOU EXTRAORDINARY

[Conclusion](#)

[References](#)

CONTENTS

[Introduction](#)

[Muhammad's Childhood](#)

[Muhammad's Family](#)

[Muhammad's Environment](#)

[Muhammad's Adolescence](#)

[Muhammad as A Young Adult](#)

[Muhammad in his 40s](#)

[Muhammad in his 50s](#)

Introduction

This book tells the story of the Prophet Muhammad as an inspirational role model for anyone who wants to be extraordinary.

The book focuses in particular on Muhammad's life before 40. You will learn how Muhammad shaped his personality as a child, dealt with the universal challenges of adolescence while a teenager, and then emerged as a leader in his community as a young adult.

This book deliberately avoids the language of historical narration used in typical biographies of the Prophet in favor of a more informal, down-to-earth approach.

The majority of traditional biographies of the Prophet written from an Islamic perspective do two things repeatedly: they focus heavily on Muhammad as Prophet after the age of 40, and they tell his story with the aim of inspiring awe in their readers.

Together, these tendencies make Muhammad less accessible to young readers, making him seem so perfect that to take him as a role model appears unrealistic.

Most Muslims, unfortunately, do not feel as personal a connection to Muhammad as they should, even though the Qur'an specifically addresses Muslims saying: "You have in the Messenger of God a good example" (33:21).

It might never even occur to a child that Muhammad was once a child like him, running around and playing. Nor would a teenager think that Muhammad — though human like all of us—went through the same trials and tribulations of adolescence, and might have learned useful lessons.

Out of our love and veneration for the Prophet — both of which he deserves, of course — we Muslims turn him into such an awe-inspiring perfect person that he is not a viable role model for our age.

In this book, the reader will get a completely different view of Muhammad, and hopefully will see how Muhammad addressed our own daily challenges, inspiring us to excel in confronting these

challenges.

Readers will also notice that the book aims to offer a realistic, practical roadmap to personal improvement, not to inspire awe and risk the sense of personal inadequacy it sometimes can elicit. Muhammad was certainly the most perfect a human can aspire to be, but he was still a human and has countless shared common denominators with us — meaning he is also a practical role model.

I have been very careful to draw my stories from highly reliable, well-documented accounts of the Prophet's life. Although I cite other sources as well, the best two in this regard are as follows:

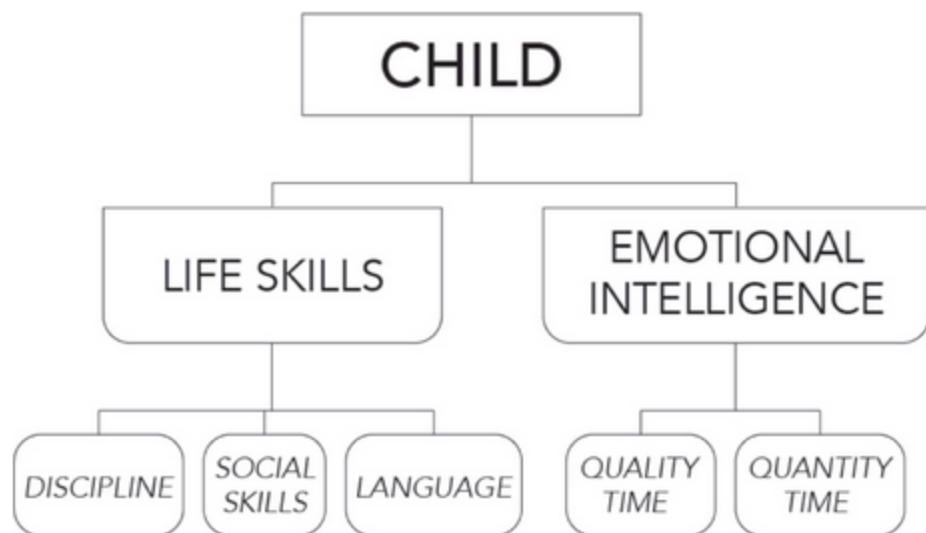
Akram Umari. *As-Sirah al-Nabawiya as-Sahihah* (The Authoritative History of the Prophet Muhammad), 2 Volumes.

Mahdi Rizqullah Ahmad, *As-Sirah al-Nabawiya fi Daw' al-Masadir al-Asliyah* (A Biography of the Prophet of Islam in the Light of the Original Sources: An Analytical Study), 2 Volumes.

Finally, the reader will notice I rely heavily on self-improvement literature, much of which teaches ideas that are highly compatible with Islamic teachings based on the Prophet's life, such as developing

social intelligence, creativity, learning to adapt to change, and developing leadership.

This book is not meant to compete with traditional Islamic biographies of the Prophet, because it does not fit into that category; nor is it another self-development guide. Instead, I have tried to make this book a unique mix of these two very different genres.



In brief

A child's personality develops in the first six years, during which they

must receive enough love and attention. In our busy lives, and amid pressing distractions, parents must dedicate more time and care to their children than the term “quality time” implies. Despite the short time Muhammad spent with his widowed mother, his emotional needs were met with hugs, kisses and smiles. Children also need an exciting environment that stimulates them to acquire valuable life skills. While this environment was the desert to Muhammad, it includes today schools/daycares, readings clubs, relatives’ homes and child-oriented fitness centers.

Chapter 1

Muhammad's Childhood

Developing Emotional Intelligence

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) lived with his mother until he was six. After he was orphaned he lived with his grandfather and uncle. His mother and others gave him the loving care every child

needs, while the harsh desert proved a stimulating environment to acquire valuable life skills.

Children's personalities are formed during the first six years. The first year develops emotions, while the second year is crucial for vocabulary building. In the third year, young children learn to interact with others, and in the following year become more self-reliant, before learning to better express their emotions and needs during the fifth and sixth years.

This chapter examines the Prophet's childhood up until the age of six, and the outsized role both his mother and wet nurse played in raising him, before looking at how his childhood experience can inspire how we raise our own children.

Children under six

The pace of any child's development varies according to environment and personality, and Muhammad was mature for his age. When he was under two years old, his wet nurse, Halima, was taken aback by his strength. Despite the wide range of growth from child to child, there are still shared features that apply to most children's

development at certain ages.

- *Six months* — A child recognizes her mother's voice and smiles in recognition of familiar faces.
- *Nine months* — The first hints of curiosity, but also stranger anxiety.
- *One year* — The desire to explore surroundings and comprehension of simple instructions.
- *Two years* — Building a vocabulary of around 200 words.
- *Three years* — Asking "Why?" incessantly; developing the skill of playing or cooperating with others, and trying to please others.
- *Four years* — Becoming self-reliant,

learning to joke, and counting from 1 to 20.

- *Five years* — A steadily expanding vocabulary and awareness of time (present and future).
- *Six years* — Confident communication and greater curiosity.

Notice that the first stage of a child's life is closely tied to his mother, who meets his emotional need for loving, whereas the following stages are spent mostly acquiring social and linguistic skills. We see that this is true in the Prophet's life as well, starting with his close relationship to his mother, as with any child early on in life.

Emotional fulfillment

Muhammad was emotionally fulfilled because his mother was free to devote herself to him, his grandfather covering the household expenses, which enabled his mother to compensate with her love for the early death of Muhammad's father. Muhammad had a very loving

mother and during the first six years of his life constantly had his emotional needs met with hugs, kisses, eye contact, and smiles.

Most children have the blessing of spending longer with their mothers than Muhammad did, but in many cases may get less loving care than he did.

It is rare, nowadays, to find a mother not completely swamped with responsibilities, from holding down a job to housework, to her husband, and other children. Aminah, Muhammad's mother, had none of that. Muhammad's grandfather, Abdul Muttalib, covered their financial expenses after Muhammad's father, Abdullah, died. Aminah, as a teenage widow, did not have to worry about putting food on the table. And Muhammad was her only child.

A warm and affectionate person, Aminah focused all her energy on taking care of Muhammad in a society where fathers typically played a central role in their children's lives.

The impact of affection on children

Showing love and affection has a huge impact on a child's

personality. She becomes more self-confident, allowing for her feelings and emotional intelligence to develop. Studies have shown that showing children love fulfills their need to feel safe, strengthening their ability to adjust to their surroundings. Making a habit out of hugging your child, affectionately greeting her when she wakes up or comes home, kissing her, and playing with her improves her psychological health and sense of self-worth.

You might not be in a situation where you can be the perfect parent you want to be, but you can still give your child as much time, attention and affection as possible. Constant affection is better than outpourings of affection only on special occasions.

How do you fulfill your child emotionally?



Make a habit of hugging and kissing him every day.



Listen attentively and don't interrupt.



Call him when you're outside the house and tell him you love him.



Play with her and don't worry about getting your clothes dirty or messing up your appearance.



Start your day with him by showing your love, and don't end it in disagreement.^{[1](#)}

She lived for him

Aminah did not remarry after her husband Abdullah died in 571 CE, even though she was young, only living herself to the age of 26. In a culture where widows were respected and women of fine lineage were held in high esteem, and with Aminah's beauty and ability to recite poetry, she could easily have remarried without being judged by society.

In fact, she would have been strongly encouraged to do so.

But Aminah chose not to remarry, remaining a widow until she died.

Like anyone in a society valuing large families, Aminah must have hoped for more children, but instead she dedicated her life to her son, Muhammad.

We should not think that what Aminah did was something normal, because it was unusual in the society in which she lived. Her choice could not have been easy for such a young girl.

Aminah gave priority to Muhammad's emotional fulfillment over her own personal fulfillment, which is what makes her life so

inspirational.

Making your child a priority

Educators talk about the importance of putting aside time for children, as if spending time with one's child is a burden and not intrinsically enjoyable. (The idea of "putting aside time" came as a compromise solution to alleviate the guilt of working mothers that they were not giving enough time to their children). We should instead be talking about *spending* more time with children, not "putting aside time," and this time should be spontaneous, not subject to a set schedule. Also, the quantity of time matters just as much — if not more — than the quality of that time. In fact, the more involved parents are with their children (and "more" here is used in direct reference to quantity of time), the less likely they are to have social, emotional, or academic problems, use drugs or alcohol, become involved in crime, or engage in premarital sex.

According to Laura Ramirez:

While it's okay to take your kids to Disneyland, it isn't a substitute for good parenting. Parents need to be there — they need to be a witness to their children's lives. That means creating good times, but more importantly, it means being there when things are tough. It means being an active participant in your child's everyday struggles.²

What does it mean to spend time with your child?



Don't feel like you always need regimented activity; often just being there and focused on him is enough.



Make her feel that she's number 1, not another item on your checklist of chores.



Make him feel that he can come to you at any time.

A desert education

Muhammad's emotional upbringing was not restricted to only his mother, but continued with Halima, his wet nurse, and her family. Muhammad lived in the desert with his wet nurse and her three children. His relationship with his own mother continued, since Mecca was 150 kilometers away, allowing visits.

Muhammad's family in the desert consisted of Halima, her husband Al-Harith, their son Abdullah, and their daughters Anisa and Shayma. The four years in which he lived in the desert were an

important stage in his childhood in which he learned much.

To understand how the desert shaped his upbringing, we will first discuss the nature of the desert in the Arabian Peninsula at the time, and the values that life taught Muhammad there.

In an age where formal schooling was practically non-existent, the desert was seen as a school of sorts, where children were sent to build up their immune systems as well as their characters. Epidemics in this age took a far worse toll in cities than in the countryside and desert, and Mecca was no exception. With a population of some 20,000 (without counting the pilgrims periodically thronging its streets, even before Islam), Mecca was particularly susceptible to outbreaks of various diseases.

For this reason, it became common to send children to the desert until their immune systems were strong. The desert was also seen as a place where spoken Arabic was purer. It was common for women in the desert to nurse city dwellers' children, both as a profession and also to expand familial ties through the bond created by nursing.

Finally, the desert also provided wide-open spaces for children to

explore, far from the small houses and narrow streets of the city.

The desert provided Muhammad with the opportunity to develop social skills, strengthen his physical body and improve his language and communication skills. What is inspiring about the desert as a school during that historical period is that it was a stimulating environment for children's physical and psychological education.

To be sure, we certainly don't advocate that you literally send your children off into the desert in this day and age. But in modern times, don't overlook the importance of experiences that can be just as stimulating for children, whether in schools/daycare, relatives' homes, child-oriented fitness centers, or elsewhere.

The important thing is for the experience to be safe, and also helpful in discovering and developing your child's talents.

Life in the desert

In order to see the impact that the desert had on Muhammad's life, and so glean what can we learn from his experience, we need to understand the nature of life in the desert.

Inhabitants scraped by on a bare-bones existence where survival was the focus and luxuries were non-existent. In this arid environment, scorching temperatures could fry an egg in the sun, and both water and shade were scarce.

Water scarcity forced Bedouins to become used to drinking just enough to survive, not to fully quench their thirst as we take for granted today. With almost no water, food sources were few and far between, as crops were not grown outside of oases, wells and springs.

Bedouins learned to be content living with a constant gnawing hunger and thirst, and never complaining, “Not camel’s milk again!”

Consumption in those days was for survival, not for pleasure, and this harshly austere life trained Bedouins to bear trials and tribulations with stoicism.

This was the environment in which Muhammad lived, and it clearly impacted upon him. Even as an adult, he never ate until full, would tie flat stones to his stomach to quell hunger pangs, would not have a cooking fire going for long in his home, and only ate meat on rare occasions, instead eating mostly dark, coarse bread. If no food was to

be found, he would fast, and he slept on a mat woven from palm leaves.

The Prophet’s lifestyle may seem astonishing when looked at from the lens of our modern age, but he learned this lifestyle at a young age and deliberately kept these habits, even when he returned to Mecca, because his home environment reinforced the healthy values he had acquired in the desert.

The values of the desert

Muhammad’s mother appreciated the values that he had learned from the desert, and knowing that a home environment should reinforce — not contradict — what is learned in school, she taught these same values of endurance and self-control.

When the young Muhammad returned to Mecca, he found a home environment emphasizing a simple, austere lifestyle. His mother ate dried meat and his grandfather gathered donations to provide water to pilgrims, while his paternal uncle worked to feed the extended family.

Of course, children feel safe and confident when the home — and society at large — reinforces the values they have learned in school.

The value of self-discipline

Children learn self-control through discipline, which means children getting used to behaving acceptably and learning to make prudent decisions. This is a process that requires energy and commitment from the parent, depending on the child's personality and the nature of the environment in which she is being raised.

Muhammad was taught discipline in the desert: going to bed and waking up at fixed times, and being expected to help with the tent or to watch over the livestock. The home environment reinforced this discipline, although in different ways.

The challenge today is to raise your child with discipline in a way that suits her surroundings and personality.

Discipline — when one is able to act responsibly regardless of one's desires — can and must be developed at an early age.

A famous study from the late 1960s and early 1970s strongly suggests that discipline in a child's life carries over into adulthood. Stanford University professor Walter Mischel offered a group of four-year-old children a marshmallow, letting them choose between eating it now or saving it for later and being rewarded with a second marshmallow (delayed gratification).

Mischel found that the children who patiently controlled their desire were more disciplined and higher achievers in a broad range of measures later on in life, compared to the group that couldn't delay gratification and chose to eat the marshmallow there on the spot.

How can you teach a child discipline?

Children cannot be taught discipline through physical or verbal abuse, but rather learn it through good parenting and kindness. Here are some methods you can try:



Praising good behavior. This will build his self-

confidence and make him consciously try to repeat the behavior in order to please you.



Using simple language when asking for something from her, making sure she understands you, and setting an example yourself.



Don't overuse "don't." Instead of saying, "Don't you raise your voice," try "Lower your voice, please." Offer practical, fun alternatives instead of constant scolding.



Choose the right time to sit down and talk to your child. Avoid doing so when you're angry or

your child is upset.

Learning social skills

We can safely assume that young Muhammad would have undertaken a range of household chores in the desert, such as carrying water, taking care of livestock, helping set up and take down tents, and helping serve elders and guests, all of which developed his skills of cooperation, sharing, and taking care of others.

There is a direct connection between children physically moving about and skill acquisition, and physically active children tend to take on a social personality and leadership roles more than less active children.

It is important that the child's movement is not constrained and a safe and pleasurable environment is provided to encourage being physically active.

The desert offered Muhammad a wide-open space to run and play, where he could acquire social skills such as cooperation, sharing and taking care of others through play.

Children learn when they're happy and having fun. Fun time is the best time to raise children, because they love playing, and surprises.

Some parents feel that children's play is a waste of time, which is patently untrue.

Studies have shown that children are most open to learning when they are playing, and develop valuable skills this way.³

Forward-thinking schools rely on fun activities to teach students skills and develop their behavior, more than on traditional classroom instruction and studying.

The importance of play

Don't try to force your child to grow up too early by cutting off his playtime; nor should you impose your preferences on the type of play.

Let her cut loose and have fun how she wants.

The famous miracle of "the splitting of the chest"⁴ happened while

Muhammad was playing with his friends, so don't underestimate the importance of playtime, which is a perfect opportunity for children to grow and learn.

The desert also provided a suitable environment for Muhammad to learn the life skills of responsibility and communication with others.

Despite the relentless heat and difficulty of life, it allowed a better space for him to get out his energy than in the narrow, crowded streets of Mecca.

Nomadic life meant being on the move every day, setting up the tents, watching after the livestock, hosting passing caravans, and looking for safe places.

All this activity would have been exciting for Muhammad and an opportunity to build his character. As we said, children learn when they're having fun.

Learning language skills

The desert was also a supporting environment for developing the

young Muhammad's language skills and ability to communicate.

Language is the main element of pre-school child development. The desert provided a social environment that was rich in vocabulary, fulfilling his linguistic needs.

His five-member family in the desert was larger than his family in Mecca, and the opportunity to encounter other Arabic dialects from constantly passing caravans was also greater than in Mecca, where Arabs would pour in to the city only during the pilgrimage season.

Families would send their children to the desert at a young age partly to strengthen their Arabic. Muhammad spent what we would call his preschool years, until roughly the age of four, in the desert benefiting from a rich linguistic environment.

Language develops faster than other skills with children. Many children begin learning words during their first year, but at around two years their vocabulary growth becomes exponential, reaching a total vocabulary of some 1,000 words by the age of four, with plenty of room, of course, for individual differences.

Language enables children to communicate and express their needs,

giving them comfort and more self-confidence.

Children who struggle linguistically will often be frustrated, and this tension might surface in unwanted behavior such as hitting and screaming.

How can you help build your child's language skills?



Read 15 minutes a day to him. An expressive story develops his imagination and vocabulary.



Listen attentively to her. This will improve her ability to express herself.



Teach him good listening skills. Paying attention to what others say is part of a child's linguistic development.

The loss of parents

We will conclude this section by discussing the death of the Prophet's mother, his subsequent move to his grandfather's house, and the excellent treatment he received there, the likes of which every child should have.

Muhammad returned to Mecca and spent two years with his mother until she died at the age of 26, when Muhammad was only six years old. You can imagine what a shock his mother's death must have been for Muhammad.

In his book, *La vie de Mahomet*, the Romanian Orthodox priest and novelist Constantin Gheorghiu imagines how Muhammad must have felt: "The child sat on her grave, talking to her, asking 'Why aren't you coming home, Mom? Don't you know that you are all I have in

this life?"⁵

Although this description cannot be treated as wholly historically reliable, it does seem a reasonable assumption of the painful blow this must have been to Muhammad. He had never known his father, who died before he was born, but was very close to his mother and had many unforgettable memories with her.

Although we all hope to never have to deal with such a situation, it is very important that we know how to handle the death of — or separation from — someone near and dear to your child.

How to deal with a child who has lost a loved one



Tell her about the death at the first opportunity, because she will sense the sadness at home and has a right to know the reason.



Take his age into consideration. Children who are 2-5 years old think of death as being like sleep, and that one can still wake up. If your child is 6-9, he will understand what death is, but fear separation.



Encourage her to express her feelings and answer her questions honestly.



Reassure him that he will still be loved and that he is not responsible for what happened (some children may feel guilty and even responsible for the death of a loved one).

After losing Aminah

Muhammad lived until he was eight in the house of his grandfather, Abdul-Muttalib. We will delve more into Abdul-Muttalib's personality in another chapter, but for now will focus on the grandfather's household in the Prophet's childhood.

Besides the grandfather himself, there was the grandmother, Fatima Amr, who has often been overlooked by traditional Islamic biographies of Muhammad that have tended to emphasize Abdul-Muttalib's role since he was the family's breadwinner.

However, it was Fatima Amr, Muhammad's paternal grandmother, who took care of the young Muhammad on a daily basis. She was not only Abdul-Muttalib's wife, but also Aminah's mother-in-law, and had given birth to and raised Abdullah, Muhammad's father.

If we said earlier that Aminah fulfilled Muhammad's emotional needs until he was six years old, it was Fatima who took care of her grandson from when he was six until he was eight.

Although we do not know for sure, it seems very possible that Muhammad as an adult named his own daughter Fatima to honor

and respect his grandmother, Fatima Amr.

A remarkable child

Muhammad was an extraordinary child, and according to the Hadith his grandfather noticed this, predicting that the young boy would one day be great.

Virtually identical predictions were also made by a monk Muhammad met as a 12-year-old while travelling with a caravan to Syria, by Aminah when she took him back to Mecca out of worry, after the “splitting of the chest” miracle, and others.

Abdul-Mutallib was in his 80s when Muhammad was living with him, and he was a doting, loving grandfather.

Muhammad’s family, even when they were predicting that he would be someone important one day, could not have imagined his future, and neither his mother nor his grandfather lived long enough to see him as Prophet. Nonetheless, they always believed that he was special and took loving care of him.

Muhammad constantly heard their praise and felt their genuine concern. Look at a child who is being told by her parents that she is smart, polite and has a future, compared to one who is being constantly put down by her parents.

Much of a child’s impression about himself is taken from his parents, since he sees them as the two people who know him best, and so believes what they say about him. He begins to build up self-esteem from his parents, and what they say about him becomes his inner voice about himself.

So watch what you say!

How to Believe More in Your Child and Build Her Self-Confidence



*All children, including yours, have talents.
Your role is to help her discover and develop her*

talents, since she will be more confident if she feels that you believe in her.



Choose your words carefully, especially when explaining what you want or don't want him to do. This goes back to our advice of "Don't overuse 'don't'" and seeking a more positive way to provide guidance, such as saying "Please keep your voice down," instead of "Don't scream!"



Try to helpfully modify his behavior without being hurtful. For example, instead of saying "Don't be so lazy," find a fun and productive way he can spend his time.⁶

Muhammad lived with his grandfather until he was eight, then moving to his uncle's house, where he stayed until he grew up and

got married.

We conclude this chapter with a summary below of how one can learn from Muhammad's childhood.

Lessons from Muhammad's childhood

Muhammad's childhood	Your child
Emotional fulfillment	
Muhammad was loved and nurtured. It helped that his mother was free to devote the time to emotionally fulfill him.	Fulfill your child's need for love and nurture. Kiss and hug her. Tell her you love her, so she feels loved and her emotional intelligence develops.
Skills	
The desert taught Muhammad self-control and discipline in an environment with plenty of chances to play and have fun. His household reinforced what he had learned.	Provide your child an environment that will improve his behavior, without threats or punishment. Give him lots of playtime, because it is his way to learn.
Language and Communication	

The desert gave Muhammad a chance to interact with people and strengthened his ability to express himself and communicate.	Help your child learn to love reading. Tell him stories, and listen to him attentively.
Self-confidence	
Muhammad heard encouraging words about himself and his future.	Discover your child's talents, treat her respectfully, and don't be overly critical.

golden bowl of iced water before putting it back in place. He then sealed the incision and left him (Salahi, p. 27).

⁵ Gheorghiu, p. 12.

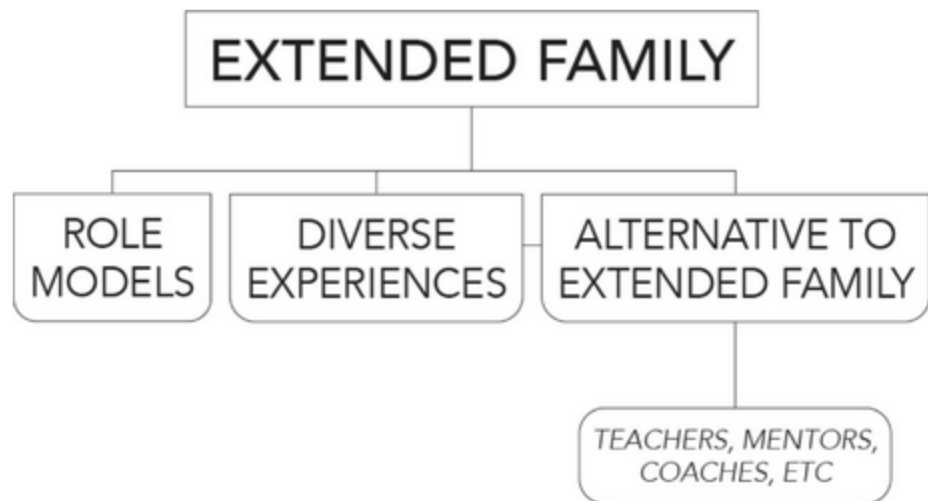
⁶ For further tips, see: Ramsey, *501 Ways to Boost Your Child's Self Esteem*.

¹ See: Severe, *How to Behave So Your Children Will, Too!*

² See: Ramirez, "Parenting Tips: Giving Your Children the Gift of Time".

³ See: Bruce, *Learning Through Play*.

⁴ While Muhammad was playing with other children, the angel Gabriel came and took him by the hand. He laid Muhammad down and opened his chest and abdomen, took out his heart and removed from it a black clot, which he threw away. As he did so, he said: "This is what Satan has in you." He then washed Muhammad's heart in a



In brief

In addition to parents, the extended family can play an important role in raising children, lessening the burden of parenting.

Muhammad was an orphan, but was raised by his extended family and learned about generosity, leadership, and persistence from encounters and stories he heard from his relatives. Today, schools, peers and social media are complementing or competing with the parents' role; nonetheless, children continue to need role models, beyond their parents, and this is where the extended family comes in. If a larger family is not available, children must have alternative caregivers (e.g., teachers, neighbors, coaches) that broaden their horizons and diversify their experiences.

Chapter 2

Muhammad's Family

Diversify your experience

In this chapter we will get to know Muhammad's extended family, including his grandfather, paternal uncle, and maternal aunt.

Learning about these relatives is complementary to what was discussed in [chapter one](#), concerning the factors that had an impact on Muhammad's childhood and the people who played a role in his life.

Even if they get short shrift in most traditional Islamic biographies, Mohammad's extended family is critical to understanding and appreciating his life.

Some people believe that it is an overly complicated subject, and they get lost in the different branches of the extended family, or don't know what to make of the names, which are no longer used in modern Arabic.

We will not get bogged down in endless names, or focus on minute details, but rather will address the turning points in Muhammad's life that can help us develop ourselves.

We will get to know Muhammad's family, until you feel like you know them personally.

If the goal of the first chapter was to emphasize the importance of exerting control over your situation, no matter how difficult it may

be, the goal of this chapter is to assert the importance of the extended family in expanding your experiences, or the experiences of your child, just as Muhammad's extended family was influential in his life.

By extended family we mean the older generations of both sides of the family — grandparents, aunts, and uncles can all help raise your child, just as Muhammad's grandfather and paternal uncle did in his upbringing.

This helps lift the burden of childrearing from the parents alone, and is beneficial because children also need caregivers who have different experiences than the parents have.

Should an extended family not be available, it is crucial that your child has alternative caregiving models, such as neighbors, teachers or coaches.

The most important thing is that parents do not have to bear the burden of raising a child alone, and that the child be exposed to a diverse range of experiences, skills and accomplishments.

The extended family

The extended family includes the father, mother, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins on both sides.

The importance of the family's role can be seen in the Arabic language. Instead of one word for "uncle," for instance, Arabic has four words, depending on whether it is the father's brother, the mother's brother, the mother's sister's husband, or the father's sister's husband.

Cousins, meanwhile, have eight different specific equivalents in Arabic!

Unfortunately, the extended family's role in raising children has been on the decline after having been a staple of life around the world for nearly all of history.

The Industrial Revolution in Europe steadily chipped away at the extended family's role, as society moved from an agricultural life (where extra helping hands are always needed) to an industrial, mechanized life.

This transformation has played out in Arab society as well, as the extended family's ties have weakened and the nuclear family has borne alone the responsibility of raising children, or sometimes with the help of a housekeeper, should the mother be working or otherwise busy.

This is not a call to return to an easily romanticized past, but rather to give the extended family an active role and re-introduce it into the equation of child development.

Some European countries are in fact reversing the earlier trend and seeing the restoration of the role of the extended family.

The Telegraph reported in 2008 that more than 850,000 households in the UK include extended family members, and this number was expected to jump 30 percent by 2028.

The paper noted that having grandparents, parents and children under a single roof had solved a problem for parents who felt torn between meeting their children's needs and taking care of their own parents, and that many felt their conscience was at peace to see their parents and children living together.

Muhammad's extended family

The Prophet's full name was Muhammad Abdullah Abdul-Mutallib Hashim Abd-Manaf Qusay. Some of these names are almost non-existent in modern Arabic and deserve a quick explanation.

Note that in the conventional Arab naming system, each of the names after the first name is the first name of the man or woman's father, then grandfather, then great-grandfather, etc.

Components of Muhammad's full name

Qusay: His given name was Zayd, but he became better known as Qusay, which is from the Arabic root meaning "to be at a great distance," referring to the fact that he left his home at a young age.

Abd-Manaf: Originally named Al-Mughira, Mohammad's great-great-grandfather took this name meaning "servant of Manaf," Manaf being of the pre-Islamic idols worshipped by Arab polytheists. This is no longer a name in Arab culture, for obvious reasons.

Hashim: Originally named Amr, he came to be known as Hashim ("breaker of bread") for his generosity in helping feed pilgrims.

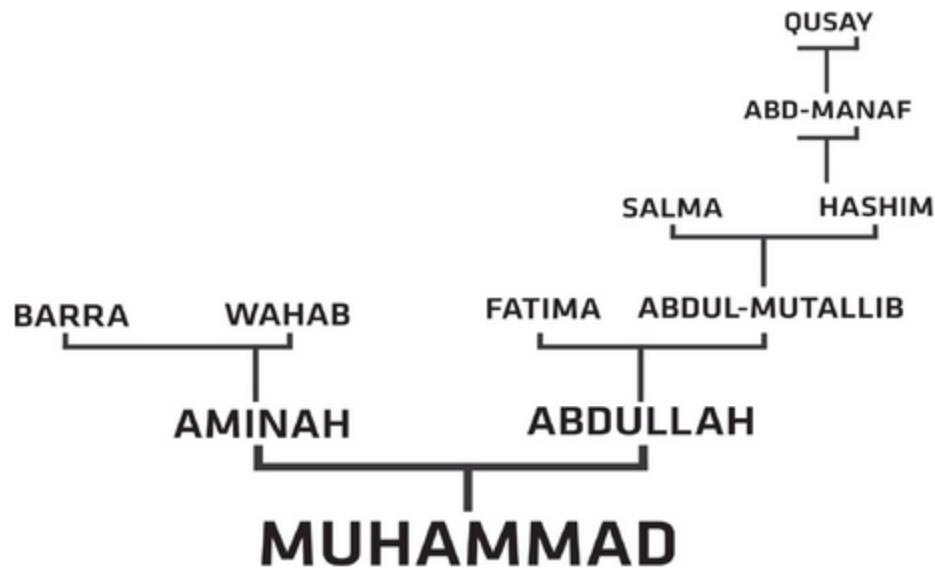
Abdul-Mutallib: Although his name was actually Shayba, the people of Mecca at first thought he was a slave of a person named Al-Mutallib, giving a moniker that stuck with him for the rest of his life.

Muhammad learned about his family tree and the accomplishments of his forefathers, even those who died long before he was born.

Meccans took pride in passing down their family histories through stories and poetry.

Thus, the extended family's role was not limited to its living members, but also included those who had passed away, particularly if they had inspirational achievements.

Figure 1. Muhammed's family tree



We will briefly get to know Muhammad's ancestors Qusay, Abd-Manaf, Hashim, and Abdul-Mutallib, and their achievements that influenced the young Muhammad.

Let's start with Qusay.

Qusay

Qusay was a key figure in Meccan history since he established the Quraysh tribe's status among the Arabs after it had been weak and divided.

Born in Mecca, Qusay spent his childhood away from home before returning to Mecca and marrying a girl from the Khuzaa tribe, which was responsible for the Kaaba. With time, Qusay grew ambitious for the Quraysh to take on this prestigious responsibility, and pushed to unify his divided tribe before pushing the Khuzaa aside to take over political leadership of Mecca.

Qusay's responsibilities included:

1. *Feeding visitors to Mecca.*
2. *Providing water, yogurt and honey to pilgrims.*

3. *Maintenance of the Kaaba.*

4. *Bearing the war banner — meaning defending Mecca if necessary.*

Qusay chose not to rule Mecca alone, creating an establishment he named “The Forum” to consult with the other tribes in Mecca, receiving their feedback and suggestions on the city’s governance.

The situation in which Qusay lived hardly encouraged him to have dreams — his tribe had been torn apart, and being raised away from Mecca, as an outsider, he had few natural supporters.

But nonetheless he was an ambitious dreamer who went out and achieved his dreams, earning the grudging respect of Meccans. The historian Ibn Hesham described Qusay as being like a religion that people would follow their entire lives.

Although Qusay and Muhammad were not contemporaries, Muhammad would have come to know Qusay and his achievements through the stories passed down about him.

The lesson Muhammad likely learned from Qusay was to draw the

energy needed for change from within yourself, not from your surroundings, or else you will be unable to bring about change.

Abd-Manaf

The downside of following personalities instead of ideas is that conflict will break out between their followers as soon as the leader dies.

This is what happened after Genghis Khan, Tamerlane, and Alexander the Great passed away, and it happened as well in Mecca with the death of Qusay: his two sons Abdul Dar and Abd-Manaf fought over who would control the Kaaba.

They eventually agreed to split the responsibilities, with Abdul Dar taking on the *nadwa* (establishing and presiding over a local assembly); *liwa* (creating a unified military unit); and *hijaba* (safeguarding the keys to the Kaaba).

Abd-Manaf, meanwhile, was responsible for providing food and water to the pilgrims, a responsibility he passed on to his son, Hashim, the great-grandfather of the Prophet Muhammad.

Hashim

As noted, Hashim's given name was Amr. He took his responsibility for feeding the poor and pilgrims seriously, insisting on giving pilgrims camel meat — considered the finest option available — despite having limited financial means, paying out of his own pocket and asking the Quraysh for donations.

A poet said about him:

Amr who broke up porridge for the people of Mecca, the
famished and starving

Established the two caravans, the winter caravan and the
summer caravan

The poet praised Hashim for feeding the hungry, and also gives him credit for starting the tradition of sending trading caravans to Yemen in the winter and Syria in the summer.

Hashim serves as a reminder that you don't have to be rich to give generously, and that giving is not restricted to money, but could also include sharing your expertise or volunteering your time.

Hashim certainly must have rubbed shoulders with pilgrims from diverse backgrounds, and dealt with them tolerantly, patiently putting up with stress and occasional abuse. As in the poetry above, it is clear that people kept stories of Hashim's generosity and tolerance alive long after he was gone, and Muhammad would have undoubtedly heard of — and been influenced by — his ancestor.

Other no-less influential men in his extended family included Muhammad's maternal grandfather, Wahab Abd-Manaf, a tribal elder and well-known figure in Yathrib (Medina) who raised his daughter, Aminah, to have a strong, expressive personality, and which made Abdul-Mutallib agree to his favorite son, Abdullah, marrying her.

Abdul-Mutallib

Born as Shaybah, he lived his childhood in Yathrib (Medina) with his mother Salma. Known for his height, good looks, and natural

leadership, Abdul-Mutallib became head of his tribe. He is associated with two events in particular in Meccan history: the discovery of the Zamzam Well, and “The Year of the Elephant.”

Discovery of Zamzam

Abdul-Mutallib himself discovered the Zamzam Well while digging for water. It was the dream of every Meccan to find the waters of Zamzam, which had been buried by the Jurhum tribe (the maternal uncles of Abraham’s son, Ishmael, peace be upon him). But no one knew the exact location of the spring.

You can imagine Abdul-Mutallib’s astonishment when he saw water suddenly flowing out of the ground between his hands, as had happened to Ishmael’s mother, Hajar.

As much as Zamzam brought Mecca to life, it caused trouble between the leaders of Quraysh who were displeased with Abdul-Mutallib controlling the spring. They agreed to have a priestess living in Syria mediate their dispute.

When they were travelling to see her, they ran out of water and nearly died of thirst. The Quraysh leaders were so certain they were doomed that they dug their own graves, except for Abdul-Mutallib, who said: “Surrendering to death would be a failure.” He began searching for water with the same relentless determination he had shown when looking for Zamzam, until he found a well and saved everyone’s lives.

The leaders saw that as a divine ruling in favor of Abdul-Mutallib, and decided to drop their dispute over Zamzam.

The point is not to tell the story of Zamzam’s discovery, but rather to emphasize the story’s impact on Muhammad’s childhood when he heard it, as a story of human determination to achieve one’s dreams, give back to society, and never give up regardless of the situation, even if others around you are surrendering. Instead, get up and try, try again.

The Prophet went through difficult times, and like any person needed something to encourage him and renew his resolve. Stories such as this would have been encouraging.

This is one of the roles of the extended family in your life and your children's life: to offer a source of inspiration with life experiences.

Life is full of stories, but the personal experience with which a grandmother or grandfather can talk has a particularly potent efficacy.

The Year of the Elephant

The story of "The Year of the Elephant" also shows the importance of keeping one's cool in a tough situation and not panicking. Do what you can, and leave the rest to God.

In 570, the year Muhammad was born, Mecca was attacked by Abraha, an Ethiopian Christian leader ruling over Yemen. Abraha had built a cathedral that he wanted to be the prime pilgrimage destination in the Arabian Peninsula and was trying to wipe out his competition with a large army bearing down on the Kaaba.

It was referred to by Arabs as "The Year of the Elephant" because

Abraha's army included a war elephant — an unusual sight in Arabian warfare.

The Meccans had no chance against the invading army and surrendered, but Abdul-Mutallib kept his calm. He asked for a meeting with Abraha, and talked to him about his camels that had been captured by Abraha's army.

Abraha was astonished that the sheikh responsible for the Kaaba would be thinking about his camels when his hometown had been occupied, and told him: "I thought that you had come here to talk about the Kaaba, not dromedaries." Abdul-Mutallib quickly retorted: "The Kaaba has a Lord that will protect it."

Abraha gave the order to destroy the Kaaba, but his war elephant didn't move and birds dropped stones on his army, injuring his soldiers, forcing a retreat.

The Arabs considered the events a miracle, and Mecca's status as a holy city was further enhanced.

The incident is recounted in the Qur'an's 105th surah:

1. *Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the owners of the Elephant? (The Elephant army which came from Yemen under the command of Abraha intending to destroy the Kaaba in Mecca)*
2. *Did He not make their plot go astray?*
3. *And He sent against them birds, in flocks,*
4. *Striking them with stones of baked clay*
5. *And He made them like [an empty field of] stalks [of which the corn has been] eaten up [by cattle].*

Abdul-Mutallib probably retold the story of the elephant countless times to his children and grandchildren, perhaps making the moral of the tale to not panic when faced with challenges in life that could threaten your safety, but instead to keep your cool and have faith that God will be with you and will not forget you or be pleased with oppression, or with His places of worship being violated.

Don't give in to despair or give up your rights, but rather demand

them with a polite dignity, and know that good times follow bad times, even if in bizarre or unexpected ways.

Achieve your goals, never say die

Many of the accomplishments that changed the course of history were based on the mettle of one or two individuals, not on money or a large number of people. The Kaaba, which countless millions would later visit, was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael, and the Zamzam spring which those same pilgrims drink from, was discovered by Abdul-Mutallib and his son. Let the experience of Abdul-Mutallib inspire you to achieve your goals, even if your means are limited or your supporters are few.

Abdul-Mutallib could have given up to the tough predicament he and his fellow travelers were in and dug his own grave, like everyone else. But he got up and looked for water, found it, and saved the others' lives. Don't ever give up — a breakthrough could be just around the corner. The water Abdul-Mutallib found could have been under the very feet of those in despair.

At times of distress, strengthen your heart, even if you are on the brink of death. A lamp has light before it is extinguished. A wounded lion still knows how to roar. — Samuel HaNagid, a prominent Hebrew-language poet in 10th century Islamic Spain

Have courage for the great sorrows of life and patience for the small ones; and when you have laboriously accomplished your daily task, go to sleep in peace. God is awake. — Victor Hugo

Inspirational examples in Muhammad's family were far from restricted to men, and included a number of women such as:

Salma: Hashim's wife, famous for her strong personality, who raised her son Abdul-Mutallib, Muhammad's grandfather.

Barra Abdul-Uzza: Muhammad's maternal grandmother, who deserves credit for raising Aminah to be a faithful wife and loving mother.

Fatima Amr: Muhammad's paternal grandmother, who raised Muhammad after he moved to his grandfather's house at the age of six. It is not known but is conceivable that Muhammad named his own daughter Fatima to honor his grandmother.

The extended family has an educational role in raising children, sometimes through stories and by grandparents sharing their experiences.

Muhammad's parents

We will now address the role of Muhammad's parents, Aminah and Abdullah.

Aminah

Aminah was born in Medina, not Mecca, and could have returned there after her husband's death but chose to remain in Mecca, living for her beloved only son Muhammad.

Her decision not to remarry after Abdullah's death should not be dismissed as an easy one. It was a significant choice for a girl who was barely 20 years old. Her priorities speak to her character, and are what made her life inspirational, as previously discussed.

The relationship between Aminah and her mother-in-law, Fatima, was a close one and did not end after Abdullah's death. Aminah settled in Mecca, deciding not to return to her own father's home.

The fact that Abdul-Mutallib covered all of Aminah's expenses suggests that the relationship between the wife and the husband's family remained good, even without the husband's presence.

The tug-of-war between a mother and daughter-in-law is an age-old phenomenon, commonly the stuff of jokes and Greek tragedy. But Aminah's example can provide inspiration for a wife to forge strong relations with her in-laws.

Abdullah

The life of Muhammad's father Abdullah is certainly worth telling. Even though he only lived to the age of 25, he could have died much earlier than that!

After Abdul-Mutallib had opened up the Zamzam spring and clashed with the Quraysh over its ownership, he refocused his energies on creating a legacy among his children and grandchildren and vowed that if God gave him 10 sons, he would sacrifice one of them.

God did bless Abdul-Mutallib with 10 sons, and he had his sons draw straws to see who would be sacrificed. Abdullah drew the short straw, which was a heartbreaking situation for Abdul-Mutallib, as Abdullah was his closest and favorite son (which in turn may reveal why Abdul-Mutallib was so dedicated to his grandson, Muhammad).

Some of Abdul-Mutallib's friends convinced him to consult a soothsayer in the hope of finding a face-saving exit. He did and he ended up sacrificing 100 camels instead of his son.

Abdul-Mutallib might have told this story to his grandchildren repeatedly, but with several options for a moral to the story: look for those who support you (his sons, in this case); be grateful to God for

the blessing of family; don't be too stubborn to listen to advice from others (his friends); and air your ideas instead of being passive, since you could end up saving a life.

Abdullah was handsome and caught the eye of many a young woman in Mecca, but his family's prestige and his work managing the affairs of the Kaaba and the family business meant that Abdullah had to keep his behavior above reproach.

He decided to ask for Aminah's hand in marriage.

Sadly, the marriage didn't last long. Abdullah fell sick and died while travelling to Palestine and he was buried in Medina before his son was even born.

Make the most of your family

The Prophet was an orphan, but he wasn't alone. He was raised by his extended family, which compensated for his parents' absence.

He heard many stories about them from people who had known his parents while they were alive, and even from people who hadn't

known them directly. He learned sacrifice from Aminah, righteousness from Abdullah, a never-give-up attitude from Abdul-Muttalib, generosity from Hashim, and leadership from Qusay.

Thus, his extended family helped raise him and broaden the range of his life experience.

Even though extended families are still present today, sadly their role in raising children has faded, this becoming often the parents' sole responsibility, which in turn has constrained children's worlds and narrowed their experiences.

As the Egyptian poet Ahmed Shawqi said, a mother is a teacher, but a family is a greater teacher, because every member has his or her own unique experience that can help raise a child or may change a child's life.

Many great figures throughout history have attributed their success to an uncle or grandfather, not necessarily to their parents.

So make use of your extended family. Let them be active educators, since you don't know who among them will end up being the most beneficial to your child.

How can I connect my children to their extended family?

Some people have extended family, but they live in another city or even a different country, and so a child doesn't feel a strong emotional connection to this extended family. The challenge is how to connect the child to the extended family. There's a lot that can be said, but here are some practical ideas:



Introduce him to your family members. Create a family photo album and with each person's picture include a short snippet saying who it is, what his or her name is, what their name means, and an inspirational story from their lives (as we did earlier in this chapter with the extended family of Muhammad).



Show your child her family tree. Create a family tree accompanied with pictures (including a picture of your child), and introduce her to the kinship ties, so she can appreciate the value of extended family and why it matters.



Make an audiovisual connection. It's easier these days than ever to stay in touch with distant family at negligible cost, so make use of programs like Skype, Google Hangouts, and WhatsApp.

Alternatives to the extended family

Another challenge is providing alternatives to fill the gap if the extended family cannot be there to help, or is unsuited to help raise children. Alternatives could include teachers, coaches, or any other inspirational model. The important thing is for the burden of raising

children to be lightened by others, and not fall on the parents alone.

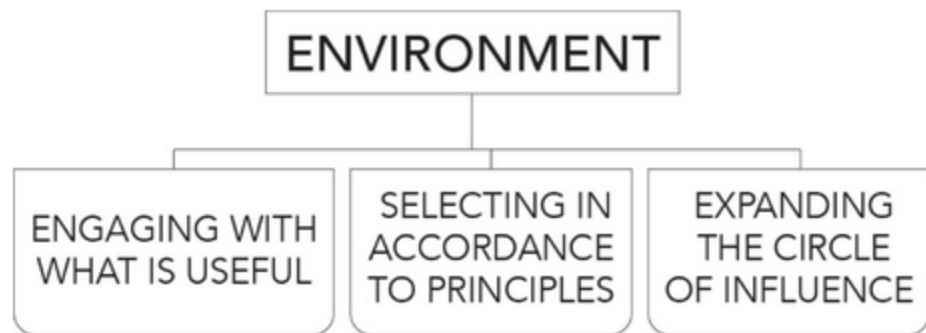
In this chapter we met the members of Muhammad's extended family, learning some of their names and professions and focusing on turning points in Muhammad's life.

The table below will remind you how we can learn from Muhammad's extended family members in having our own extended family play a more active role in our lives, and the lives of our children.

Lessons from Muhammad's extended family

Muhammad's family	Your family
Muhammad's extended family makes up for his loneliness. Muhammad lived as an orphan, but not alone. His extended family compensated for the absence of his parents.	The extended family makes up for your child's isolation: When she might feel lonely, your extended family makes her forget her worries with visits, travel, overnight stays, etc.

The extended family taught and inspired Muhammad: the accomplishments of his extended family inspired him and at the same time taught him his hometown's history (e.g. the story of Zamzam and The Year of the Elephant)	The extended family teaches and inspires you or your children. The elderly preserve memories and teach inspirational stories.
The extended family gave Muhammad experience and skills: Leadership from his grandfather, compassion from his mother, commerce from his uncle, and so on	The extended Family members can bring to you or to your child a wealth of experience surpassing that of the parents alone. Let your extended family provide this to you or to your child
The extended family gave Muhammad security: Belonging to a prestigious if poor family	The extended family gives you or your child security: Feeling part of a loving, unified family is more important than feeling like he comes from a privileged background.



convictions and used them to develop himself. In times of mounting social pressures to comply with the majority, we should exert more control over ourselves and our circumstances, and use both to our advantage.

In brief

We are certainly influenced by our environment, but we are not totally shaped by it. Instead of giving in to or complaining about difficult conditions, we must strive to overcome challenges and stand out in whatever we are doing, even if we lack the support of the culture around us. The young Muhammad — before he became Prophet — utilized already existing opportunities in tune with his

Chapter 3.

Muhammad's Environment

Expand your circle of influence

Having discussed Muhammad's childhood up until the age of six, including the role of his mother, wet nurse and extended family in his upbringing, we will now look at the environment in which

Muhammad lived in Mecca and the people and society he encountered.

You may be wondering how life in Mecca 1,400 years ago could possibly be relevant to our daily existence today. Times have changed, after all, and much of life at the time revolved around objects that are outdated relics in modernity, whether idols, camels, or swords.

However, we are not going to be delving into the minute physical details of Mecca during the Prophet's childhood anymore than is necessary to understand the prevalent ideas and lifestyle of the time.

The goal of this chapter is not to talk about Mecca per se, but to understand the context in which Muhammad was raised, since the surrounding environment is critical for understanding any person's life.

Furthermore, we want to encourage the reader to think about the environment in which *they* live, and how they can develop within it.

Shaping one's environment

Muhammad spent 85 percent of his life in Mecca — 53 out of his 63 years — living with different families in a range of houses and neighborhoods, and working various jobs.

He built a family and cultivated many friendships.

Of most interest are not the influencing factors in Muhammad's environment; rather, it is how Muhammad stood out among others who lived in the same environment.

Every human is a product of her surroundings, but this does not mean that she loses her unique personality within that environment. We will see how Muhammad moved with the flow of people in his surroundings, but in a way that suited his personality and principles.

We will also see examples of women who overcame their circumstances and shined in fields society considered “men's work,” the non-Arabs who outperformed in a majority Arab society, and monotheists going against the grain of a deeply polytheistic community.

With all of these minorities or marginalized groups, as in the life of the Prophet himself, individuals refused to be eclipsed by the norms of society.

This chapter, then, seeks to inspire you to be loyal to your community or society, but without losing your own consciousness and uniqueness.

Don't blindly adopt all of society's practices just because "that's how it's done", without thinking for yourself. Decide for yourself what suits you and your aspirations best.

So let's start with Mecca and its people.

Mecca

Mecca is located in western Saudi Arabia, across the Red Sea from Egypt and Sudan, with an area spread out over some 500 square kilometers. It is set amidst rocky hills reaching as high as 600 meters, twice the height of the Eiffel Tower, and with a weather of average highs of 47 degrees Celsius (116 degrees Fahrenheit) in summer and 25 degrees Celsius (77 degrees Fahrenheit) in winter.

Even before the dawn of Islam, the most important feature distinguishing Mecca was the Kaaba, and the sense of stability and safety it granted to local citizens. It was standard practice for cities around the world to be surrounded by walls, citadels, or other defenses to ward off potential invaders, but Mecca was an unarmed holy city in which fighting was banned by tribal tradition.

The pre-Islamic Arabs worshipped a diverse pantheon of idols, and one copy of each was kept in Mecca, helping ensure the tribes would respect the truce. Each region or tribe had its own local gods. For instance, the population of Ta'if primarily worshipped a pagan goddess named Allat; people in Yathrib (as Medina was known) revered another known as Manat, and so on.

Mecca contained some 360 statues and idols representing all of the Arabs' gods, making it a sacred space among frequently feuding tribes.

Although it is difficult to know with any precision, some scholars estimate that around 20,000 people lived in and around Mecca in the late 6th and early 7th centuries. The neighborhoods within Mecca were divided according to tribe, with people sharing a common male

ancestor on their paternal side considered to be members of the same tribe.

The dominant tribe in Mecca was the Quraysh, of which Muhammad was a part, and who traced their roots back to their ancestor Nadhr, 12 generations before the Prophet was born.

The Quraysh's houses were concentrated near the Kaaba, and they bore responsibility for the upkeep of the Kaaba and care for pilgrims.

Society

Let us look at the structure of 7th century Meccan society, including the roles of women and non-Arab minorities, to see how both overcame substantial disadvantages and thrived.⁷

Each tribe consisted of clans and extended families. For example, all Quraysh traced their lineage back to Nadhr, but about 10 clans existed within the Quraysh tribe, each founded by one of Nadhr's sons.

The tribal structure had an outsized impact on the nature of society

and people's mentalities. Individual security was derived from the strength of one's tribe. If an assault occurred, the assailant's entire tribe would bear the consequences, pooling together to pay "blood money" as compensation.

The extent of an individual's unquestioning loyalty to the tribe surpassed any analogy that can be made in a non-tribal society, such as a soccer fan's loyalty to a particular team. The degree of loyalty increases according to direct family ties, intensifying with smaller sub-tribal units such as the clan.

A famous Arab proverb illustrates this tiered loyalty concisely: "I against my brother, my brothers and I against my cousins, then my cousins and I against the strangers."

For this reason, feuds could easily break out from time to time within a single tribe — as happened in the Quraysh when its leader Qusay died, and his sons fought over who would take over responsibility for the Kaaba (more detail on this in the next chapter).

Tribal loyalty did not mean that amity reigned uninterrupted between an individual and the tribe, and a tribe could decide to expel

a member for a serious offense, which also, practically speaking, meant that without the tribe's protection and promise to avenge any attack, that unfortunate person was considered fair game and could be killed.

Some tribes would officially announce a member as being expelled at the Souq Okaz Bazaar, which was the main public open-air market in the region. For example, Al-Barrad ibn Qays was famously expelled in around 590 CE for disgracing his tribe with his alcoholism. On occasion, a person might choose to leave his tribe and join another.

Someone who joined a new tribe acquired the full rights and protection of his new tribe (similar to the process of naturalization today, but without the right to hold dual nationality).

Among the different types of relationships in pre-Islamic Arabia were inter-tribal alliances, loosely parallel to international alliances in our modern world. The Quraysh was allied to the other Meccan tribes to better regulate the pilgrimage process, as well as with various tribes across the peninsula to protect its trade caravans headed for Syria or Yemen — an alliance system mentioned in the 106th surah of the Qur'an (Surah Quraysh).

These alliances carried with them the same reciprocal protection guarantees that existed between an individual and tribe, such as that an attack against one was considered an attack against the entire alliance.

Another type of relationship was the system of *jawar* (neighborhood), wherein a person travelling away from home and the protection of his tribe could appeal for protection from a local tribe or influential person (which could be seen as a rough pre-cursor to the international refugee system created in the 20th century).

Women

The tribes were deeply patriarchal in nature, as can be seen in the fact that tribal affiliation was patrilineal (determined by the father's tribe, not the mother's). Girls were treated not necessarily with contempt, but certainly harshly, as can be seen in a number of common practices in pre-Islamic Arabia — a society that highly valued men's role in warfare and labor:

- Wives could be abandoned on the slightest pretext

(such as for having borne a girl).

- Polygamy was unlimited, without any limits on one man marrying multiple women who were sisters.
- Open extramarital affairs were considered acceptable for men.
- Most shockingly, female infants were often buried alive by families hoping for a boy, a practice prohibited by the Qur'an (81: 8-9 and elsewhere).

Despite all of these wrongs perpetuated against women, some extraordinary women were still able to defy their society's customs and forge a place for themselves where men acknowledged them as their equals. Among those women were:

- Khadija bint Khuwaylid: A prominent businesswoman

who hired Muhammad as an employee, and later married him.

- Arwa bint Harb: The wife of Abu Lahab, she challenged patriarchal customs in society by urging her husband to turn against his nephew, Muhammad. She also persuaded two of her sons to divorce the Prophet's daughters.

Of course, Islamic history views Khadija and Arwa as extremely different people, but what they held in common was that they both challenged the constraints put on them by society and stood out in a society where women were not encouraged to be visible.

Khadija was a shrewd merchant deploying her business acumen and capital in a field almost entirely monopolized by men. You, too, should discover your talents and put them to use, even if your family, your spouse, or your boss are less than supportive![8](#)

Foreigners

Mecca was also home to merchants or craftsmen from the Horn of Africa, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. They were a mix of Arabs and non-Arabs, free men and slaves, and the largest portion of them had come from Syria fleeing the Byzantine persecution of Monophysite Christians.

Others were looking for jobs in Mecca and neighboring commercial and manufacturing centers.

We do not have precise data about their numbers, but several sources estimate that they were no more than a few hundred. The foreigners were unique for their religion (Christianity), valued for their skill as blacksmiths, tanners, goldsmiths, and other crafts, and had good relations with the rest of the population.

Even though they were a foreign minority, unprotected by a tribe, some thrived in the community as a result of their unique skills and talents.

These included:

1. *Jabra Al-Rumi: A blacksmith deeply interested in Holy Scriptures and who was a close friend of the Prophet Muhammad, so much so that some of the polytheist Arabs claimed that Jabra had taught the Prophet the Qur'an. A verse in the Qur'an refers to this, saying: "And We certainly know that they say, 'It is only a human being who teaches the Prophet.' The tongue of the one they refer to is foreign, and this Qur'an is [in] a clear Arabic language" (Al-Nahl: 103).*
2. *Yasar Al-Rumi: A friend of Jabra's, also interested in Holy Scriptures. (They were not related. Rumi — as in the famous Sufi poet — means "Roman" or "Byzantine" in Arabic and so was a common name given to people coming from Byzantine territory).*
3. *Suhaib Al-Rumi: He started with only the clothes on his back, but became one of the wealthiest merchants in Mecca in only a few years.*

There were others as well, such as Salman Al-Farisi (from Persia), Bala'am Al-Suri (from Syria), and Bilal Al-Habashi (from Ethiopia), and a Coptic carpenter whose name has been lost to history.

Non-Arabs in Mecca spoke broken Arabic in a society that placed great esteem on verbal eloquence. Nonetheless, many of these foreigners excelled due to their knowledge and expertise.

Today, some Muslims feel inferior mainly because they don't know classical Arabic to be able to read the Qur'an, or lack other skill sets. The experience of foreigners in Mecca inspires one not to obsess about points of weaknesses, but rather develop one's strengths and talents.

In his book *Strengths Finder 2.0*, Tom Ruth argues that people have several times more potential for growth when they invest energy in developing their strengths instead of correcting their deficiencies.

His studies have shown that people who have the opportunity to focus on their strengths every day are six times more likely to be engaged in their jobs and over three times more likely to report having an excellent quality of life in general.⁹

This obviously is not an invitation not to learn Arabic or acquire a new skill but a warning against obsessing about something at the expense of not appreciating or overlooking what one is also good at.

The case of Muhammad in the bazaar, women in the business and the public sphere, and non-Arab minorities all show the true power of humans when focusing on their circle of influence rather than their circle of concern.

So strive to stand out and make a name for yourself, wherever you are, even if you don't have all the means and support of the culture around you.

Economy

With an arid climate that allowed only limited agriculture, Mecca's prosperity was based on trade, exploiting its position between the economic powerhouses of Yemen and Syria to build an entrepôt economy.

A wide range of local and foreign products could be found in Mecca's markets, such as perfumes, jewels, clothes, and food imported from

India, Egypt, Syria, Persia, and Yemen. Mecca on average sent seven large trade caravans a year to bring goods from Syria and Yemen; they knew the high-demand goods in Arabian markets and provided them to Arab consumers during shopping and pilgrimage seasons.

An example of the Quraysh's business acumen can be seen in the actions of Amr ibn Al-'As. When he went to negotiate with the Ethiopians on behalf of the Quraysh polytheists, to request that Muslim refugees who had fled to Ethiopia be expelled, he brought tanned hides as a gift. A veteran trader, Amr knew that Ethiopians had a soft spot for hides.

Meccan traders regularly visited Ethiopia with goods from Iraq and Syria, returning with Ethiopian products. Many Meccans worked in commerce, and even those who didn't physically join the caravans — such as the elderly and women — would contribute by investing capital or hiring someone to sell their goods for them.

The economy of Mecca was trade based, and we have touched upon its people, including women and foreign minorities, and how certain people were able to thrive despite a hostile environment. Now we must go into more depth on the bazaar in Mecca, and observe how

Muhammad interacted with the bazaar.

The point is not to examine Muhammad's life in detail, but rather to get to know the environment in which he lived.

The broader point: you can master your surroundings without getting lost in them or losing your uniqueness.

The bazaar

Mecca benefited from the inflow of Arabs for shopping and the pilgrimage, much as tourism can profit any country. The major Meccan bazaars were not set up permanently in a fixed location, but rather would be in different places on different days. The most famous bazaars were Mijana, Dhu Al-Mijaz, and Okaz.

The Souq of Okaz was the most famous bazaar in Mecca (*souq* meaning “bazaar” or “market”), and wasn't only a market: it also had an annual festival with poetry readings and feats of athletic prowess, as well as all kinds of local and imported products.

The Prophet Muhammad lived during the heyday of the Souq of

Okaz, and shopped in it, but kept his distance from its seedy underbelly. Like so many bustling markets around the world, the Souq of Okaz had its share of gambling, prostitution, and other immoral behavior.

Muhammad was smart enough to be careful around the Souq of Okaz, going there to do business but staying clear of trouble. Let's paint more of a picture of daily activity in the bazaar in early 7th century Arabia.

The Souq of Okaz

The Souq of Okaz was packed with an incredible range of activities: buyers and sellers; poetry contests, and sporting competitions; various tribes offering acts of charity, such as feeding the poor, giving a helping hand to beggars, or paying ransom and freeing prisoners; dispute resolution and treaty negotiations were also a focus.

The tribes came from Mecca, Ta'if, and Yathrib (Medina), and as far afield as Bahrain, Oman, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, setting up their red leather tents on the outskirts of the bazaar, with each tribe flying its own banner. The tribes all brought goods with them to sell, as well as

their most talented poets, who tried to outdo one another in praising their own tribe.

Also within the crowded bazaar were more sordid goings-on. Sexual flirtation or plain harassment could explode into a fight between tribes. Dens of vice were aplenty for those looking for gambling or prostitution, and they sought to lure in wide-eyed Bedouin boys coming into the city for the first time.

And of course theft, cheating, and exploitation were rarely absent from the bazaar.[¹⁰](#)

Muhammad in the bazaar

If you could travel back in time and wander through the Souq of Okaz, you would notice some unusual behavior that was completely normal at the time. Women wore the *burqa*, which of course still exists in some countries. But many men also covered their faces.

The reasons cited for this are many. Perhaps it was to hide their handsome features (which surely could not have been the case for everyone!) or, on the contrary, to draw attention to themselves by

creating an aura of mystery.

A more pragmatic motivation might have been to avoid been identified and kidnapped for ransom by a rival tribe.

You also would have seen people gathered around, swapping stories, gossiping, and telling jokes — perhaps a more familiar sight. Elsewhere, for a fee, fortune-tellers would consult diving arrows that advised “yes” or “no” or a particular action (predating the Magic 8 Ball by 1,300 years).

The Souq of Okaz was truly a colorful carnival of people, goods and activities.

Muhammad lived through this era of the Meccan bazaars and shopped in the Souq of Okaz. But he had the wisdom to choose what was good for him.

Even if it seemed like almost everyone else accepted the seedy side of the bazaar, Muhammad still prudently avoided trouble, judging by his own principles and beliefs the actions of his society, rather than giving in to what society deemed acceptable if he knew it was wrong.

Muhammad bought and sold in the market, but otherwise only was drawn to what was thought provoking as he contemplated his life and God.

We know from the Hadith that when he was in his 20s, Muhammad heard the famous speech given by the preacher Qiss ibn Saada in the Souq of Okaz, who warned the public that they were oblivious to God Almighty. The fact that Muhammad stood and listened attentively to the preacher, as pedestrians swarmed by, illustrates his early interest in religion.

Among the pronouncements of the preacher Qiss, he said:

He who lived has died, and he who died has lost his chance ... Do people think they will go and never come back? Are they so happy with their graves that they decided to stay? Or have they been left there to sleep? Damn the heedless rulers, the deserted nations, and the long-gone centuries ... where are those who built and constructed, who made decorations and reliefs? ... Weren't they wealthier than you and lived longer than

you? ... Now even their bones have decayed, and their houses are abandoned, inhabited by stray dogs. Only God is everlasting. He is One and only He is to be worshipped. He is not a Father, nor was He born.

Muhammad kept this sermon by Qiss in his mind until he was anointed Prophet almost two decades later. The fact that he was so engrossed in Qiss's words is significant.

It is not an ordinary 20-something who would disregard the temptations of the bazaar to listen to a sermon.

The episode illustrates how people — particularly young people — have the ability to choose the right path, even when surrounded by those trying to lead them astray.

The circle of influence

Rather than complaining of difficult circumstances and conditions (our circle of concern), we must work on expanding our circle of influence.

Our circle of concern includes all the problems that worry us but that we can't control (e.g., moral laxity, other peoples' attitudes and behaviors). Our circle of influence includes the things we can control.

We might not be able to prevent moral laxity or control others' behaviors, but we can certainly think for ourselves and play a more proactive role. In the case of Muhammad, people did not come to the bazaar to listen to street corner preachers, and few shoppers bothered pausing to listen to Qiss's words, much less commit them to heart.

The bazaar environment hardly encouraged that. People were coming for entirely different reasons (to be "heedless", as Qiss put it). But while other young men in his age were drawn to the wild side of the bazaar, Muhammad stopped in the middle of the crowd, looking for enlightenment. He did not withdraw from his surroundings, but he avoided going down the wrong path that many of his peers were going down.

Polytheism

There was a range of religious beliefs in the Arabian Peninsula in the

late 6th century, but the predominant religion was polytheism. Of course, this form of Arab polytheism died out long ago, and is not understood well by most people today.

Many Meccan polytheists did believe in God, but worshipped other objects alongside God that they considered to be holy, such as the sun.

Sun worshippers bowed down before the sun and might name their child Abdul-Shams (Servant of the Sun), while those worshipping the angels considered them to be God's daughters. In other words, they did worship God, but also considered other objects or deities to be worthy of worship along with Him.

In the remainder of the chapter, we look at religious beliefs in late 6th-early 7th century Mecca, including the minority who called themselves monotheists or Hanafis, and whose beliefs were sharply divergent from that of the majority.

The idea — once again — is to show how Muhammad, in a predominantly polytheist society, was able to expand his circle of influence and think for himself.

The Monotheists

Not all Meccans followed majority polytheist beliefs. There were also small Jewish and Christian minorities, and another group named the Mandaeans (which still exist and comprise 60-70,000 people, living mostly in northern Iraq, but scattered post-2003), and monotheists with diverse beliefs but united by the conviction that Abraham had built the Kaaba and had worshipped nothing but God.

The monotheists, however, were fractured and did not agree (or perhaps know) exactly how Abraham had worshipped God.

Some later converted to Judaism and others to Christianity. Islamic historians also label them "Ahnaf," but disagree as to how many there were during Muhammad's time.

Among them included:

- Waraqa Nawfal: An intellectual who also knew Hebrew and was well informed on religious history.

- Zayd Amr: Critical of Meccan society and was harassed for his religious beliefs.

The Ahnaf were a tiny minority, and yet were able to preserve their traditions in the face of a majority with very different beliefs.

This is no call for mindless rebellion against society. Rather, you should build your principles out of conviction, not just mimic whatever is prevalent within society. Use your intellect to think for yourself.

Control your environment

Although there is still much that could be said about Mecca, we have outlined the main features of Meccan society at the time of Muhammad (women, minorities, the economy, etc). Most importantly, we have shed light on how the Prophet Muhammad was in control of his environment, and how women, foreigners, and the Mandaean all reacted to their societal surroundings.

Nature versus nurture

In the next chapter we will look at Muhammad's extended family and how it played a role in diversifying his life experiences. But first, an important thought with which to end this chapter.

The nature versus nurture debate has raged for centuries unresolved, but perhaps the real answer when thinking about what shapes us the most is neither our environment nor our genes: it's *you* yourself.

It is you that determines how to interact with your environment and those around you — your spouse and children, your neighbors, your co-workers.

Your environment and your genes are undoubtedly important, but you should never misunderstand this to mean that you do not have the ability to set your own course.

In this chapter, we saw real-life examples of people who mastered their environment, despite most facing difficult circumstances and an unsupportive environment. They overcame these obstacles and stood out in society.

The table below will briefly remind you of these inspirational examples.

Lessons from Muhammad's environment

Muhammad's environment	Your environment
Muhammad's environment contained many temptations, but also good alternatives, e.g. Muhammad listening to Qiss ibn Saada's moving sermon in the Bazaar.	Don't complain about your surroundings. Look for opportunities and alternatives that suit your ambitions and let you develop.
Muhammad's environment had societal pressure in favor of polytheism, yet the monotheists resisted this pressure.	Don't imitate the dominant trend in society just because it's what everyone else is doing. Make the effort to express your own convictions
Muhammad's Arab society had marginalized non-Arab ethnic groups present, yet some were able to thrive due to expertise and skills	Be confident in your talents and skills, even if you're a minority. You will discover that the majority will respect you for it

Muhammad's society in Mecca was heavily biased against women; nonetheless some were able to claim a prominent place.

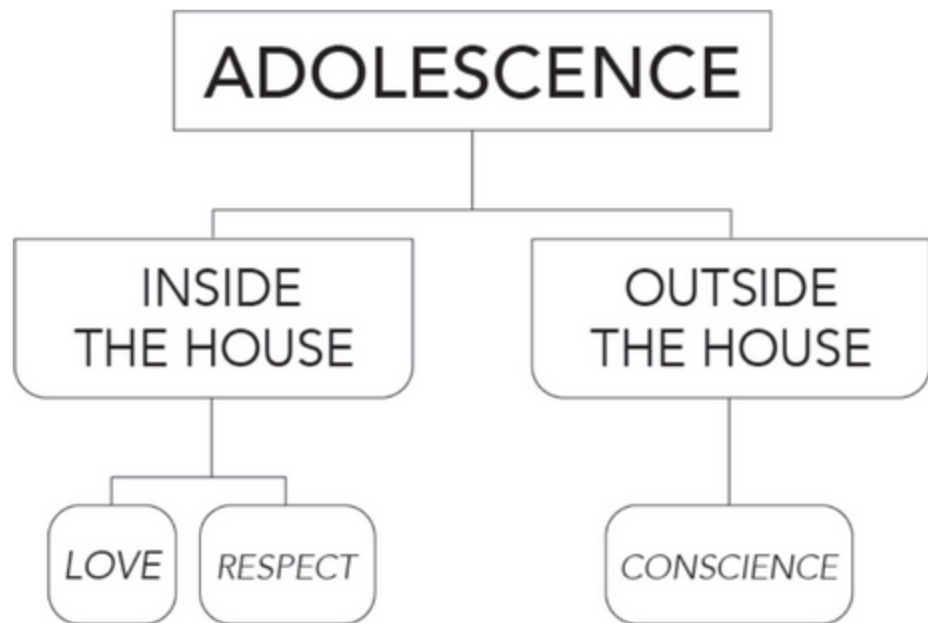
Express your talents, even if society offers little support and encouragement.

⁷ All information here about pre-Islamic Arabia is taken from the Arabic-language book *The Age of the Prophet (PBUH) and His Environment before the Mission*, by Mohammed Ezzat Darouza.

⁸ For more on women who excelled in Muslim societies, despite their difficult circumstances, listen to my audio series of 10 lectures titled "Women Inspired by the Beloved" (London, 2007).

⁹ See: Ruth, *Strengths Finder 2.0*.

¹⁰ Most of the information on the *Souq of Okaz* is from Hammour, *Souq okaz wa mawasim al-hajj*.



In brief

Adolescence is commonly perceived to be an awkward and troublesome phase instead of a natural transition between childhood and adulthood. In reality, nothing is intrinsically negative about teenagers, who can equally behave well and responsibly if provided proper care, trust and respect. After the death of his mother, Muhammad lived, until the age of 25, with the family of his uncle, who treated him with love and respect. Proper care inside a stable home builds a teenager's conscience to deal with the challenges — as well as the opportunities — of adolescence when away from parental supervision.

Chapter 4.

Muhammad's Adolescence

Be reliable

Most people think of adolescence as an awkward, sensitive phase. Some may have even hesitated on seeing the title of this chapter. Could the Prophet have once been a teenager?

However, adolescence is a perfectly natural transitional time between childhood and adulthood, one through which every adult human passes, and should not be thought of as somehow embarrassing or unpleasant.

It is true that adolescence is generally accompanied by bursts of hormonal activity, but not all of the changes are negative by any stretch of the imagination. The human energy of teenagers is not intrinsically positive or negative; rather, is shaped by their surroundings and individual personalities.

The real challenge is not with adolescence itself as a stage of life, but rather with the environment in which a teenager lives. Teenagers are not inherently exasperating, but are very sensitive, and need to be handled intelligently.

In the second chapter we got to know Muhammad's extended family. In this chapter we will learn more about what his life was like inside and outside the home during his adolescent years.

The goal of this chapter is to strengthen teenagers' self-confidence, and help others understand that teenagers can play a positive role if

they are in a loving, respectful environment that constructively channels their energy.

The teenage years

Although the definition of adolescence varies from culture to culture, and some environments encourage a faster transition to adulthood than others, in this chapter we will focus specifically on Muhammad's teenage years.

Some Muslim readers might here be saying, "Muhammad was under God's protection, and there's no way he had to go through the trials and tribulations of being a teenager."

It's true that God protected Muhammad, but within the constraints of the Prophet's fully human nature and using means that any adult can benefit from in raising teenagers.

God acted through the people who lovingly nurtured the young Prophet and provided him with an environment that harnessed his energy — just as any of us can do.

We should not be misled by the Prophet's extraordinary life into overlooking how inspirational it can be for any ordinary persons seeking to develop themselves. Otherwise, the story of Muhammad would be useful only to awe listeners, and not as a practical example of how we can use him as a model for self-improvement.

Love and respect at home

Muhammad lived with the family of his uncle, Abu Talib, which comprised eight people: Abu Talib, his wife, Fatima bint Asad, and their children Jaafar, Jumana, Fakhita, Aqil, Ali and Talib.

We do not know much about the house's size, how many rooms there were, or the type of furniture, but historians believe the family was not well off. There were occasional family disputes due to their financial situation, but nonetheless the overall family environment was stable, which is important — particularly during adolescent years.

Muhammad spent his teenage years in a stable, caring home with an understanding, appreciative environment.

The Qur'an highlights how God protected Muhammad at this sensitive stage in life: "Did He not find you as an orphan and give you refuge?" (93:6). Refuge here was not just a roof over Muhammad's head, but was a stable family environment meeting a teenager's needs for love and respect.

Study after study has shown that children raised in stable homes have better psychological health, are more successful in school, and are less vulnerable to problems such as drug use and suicidal thoughts.

Stability and understanding must also be accompanied by love and affection, both of which were provided in the household where Muhammad spent his teenage years.

Abu Talib loved his nephew Muhammad dearly, displaying his love in a number of ways, including:

- Waiting for him before having meals together as a family.

- Sleeping near to him.
- Taking him along on errands and trips.

A house with seven children running around could either be a paradise or a hell on earth, and Fatima played a crucial role — no less important than Abu Talib — in ensuring it was a loving, stable environment.

The traditional biographies of the Prophet's life spend little time on Fatima, and we know relatively little about her interaction with the young Muhammad. But we do know that she had a reputation as a caring wife and mother who did an outstanding job of raising her children (including key figures in early Islamic history such as Ali and Jaafar). A hadith, or saying of the Prophet, testifies to this.

Muhammad reportedly said: "Other than Abu Talib, no one was as kind to me as Fatima."

Muhammad spent a total of 17 years in Fatima bint Asad's house, until he married Khadija. Even after marrying Khadija and moving

out of the house, Muhammad's relationship with his aunt Fatima only grew stronger.

When Fatima's husband, Abu Talib, died, Fatima chose to convert to Islam and moved in with her son Ali and daughter-in-law Fatima, the Prophet's daughter. The younger Fatima took good care of her mother-in-law, repaying the kindness Fatima bint Asad had shown to her father in his youth.

Muhammad remained close to his aunt until she died in Medina. When she passed away, he dug her grave himself as a sign of his love, and prayed for her soul.

You, too, should try to build a strong relationship with your teenager that only grows stronger with time.

Adolescents need support

Adolescence is a trying stage, and the family needs to give its support, love, and affection. This emotion works like magic with teenagers, because it:

- Fulfills their needs for attention and appreciation from others.
- Increases their self-confidence.
- This self-confidence in turn makes teenagers behave more responsibly, so as to be held in the esteem and confidence of their loved ones.

Muhammad lived in loving environments successively with his mother, grandmother, and aunt and he showed his aunt and uncle's family the same love and appreciation he received in return.

Muhammad worked as a shepherd to help his uncle, traveling with him, and when Abu Talib passed away, Muhammad was overcome by sadness (this year, 619 CE, was also when his wife Khadija died and is known as "the year of sorrow").

Muhammad was likewise distraught when his aunt Fatima passed away; he dug her grave with his own hands and prayed that God

would have mercy on her soul.

How Do You Love a Teenager?



Celebrate her achievements.



Listen closely to him without interrupting or judging.



Let him know you love and appreciate him.

Respect

Simply loving a teenager is not enough — you must show respect as well. Muhammad had a family that treated him with the utmost respect, helping him develop a refined personality that acted respectfully.

These are some of the ways in which Muhammad acted and how they can inspire your behavior.

Muhammad's behavior	Your behavior
When Muhammad was 12 years old, he told a monk who asked him to swear by the Quraysh's gods before answering some questions: "Don't ask anything by Allat and Al-Uzza, by God there is nothing I hate other than them," before adding: "Now ask me anything you want."	Don't imitate others simply because they are the majority. In the Prophet's case, the vast majority of Meccans were polytheists, but Muhammad broke away from the crowd. Express your personal beliefs while being polite and respectful of other's beliefs.

Muhammad ate at a moderately slow pace when having a family meal with his aunt, uncle, and cousins, not gulping down his food and bolting for the door.	Don't impatiently or insistently demand something. Be patient, and make your requests friendly and respectful.
Instead of showing up in the kitchen first thing in the morning bleary-eyed and unkempt, Muhammad would always wash his face and comb his hair first	Take care of your appearance, even if you're with the family at home.

Abu Talib was known for treating people well, and Meccans deeply respected him, even though he was not financially well off. It was a society in which the poor were rarely esteemed socially — early Arab chroniclers say that, "No poor Quraysh were powerful except for Abu Talib and Utba, who became powerful without money."

The emergence of Abu Talib as a leader of Meccan society was an exception to the rule, and occurred due to his impeccable ethics. His morals were reflected in his treatment of his family: his wife Fatima,

his six children, and Muhammad of course. Respectful treatment at home is critical for teenagers.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of respect when dealing with teenagers. This is not related to the personality or behavior of the teenager, but rather must stem from the personality of whoever is dealing with the teenager.

Respect a teenager for their humanity and the difficult transition to adulthood, not because her behavior is praiseworthy.

The Prophet lived his teenage years in an environment of respect because that was the kind of person Abu Talib was. We highly doubt that Abu Talib would have ever hit, cursed, or mocked anyone, whether family or stranger, which would have been unbecoming of such an honorable person.

If Muhammad had had the misfortune of instead spending his teenage years with his notorious uncle Abu Lahab, and wife Arwa, it is unlikely that he would have been treated well.

It is crucial to realize that whether a teenager is respected or not depends less on the teenager than it does on the character of the

adult.

Below are some examples of how Abu Talib treated Muhammad in his adolescent years, which hopefully will inspire you as you try to deal with your teenager:

How Abu Talib acted with the teenage Muhammad	How you can act with your teenager
Abu Talib set aside food for Muhammad when he saw that he was not voraciously eating like his cousins.	Respect your teenager's differences, and provide the right environment for his personality, since he could have unique needs. Doing so will reduce possible points of disagreement and help create an environment conducive to growth.

Abu Talib encouraged Muhammad to be present with the rest of the family during meals, telling him, "You're a blessing to us." Abu Talib asked the rest of the family not to eat until Muhammad was there as well.	Appreciate your teenager, and tell her how happy you are with her strengths and value. This will build her self-confidence.
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Listen carefully to them without interrupting.



Don't humiliate them, and don't scold or blame them in front of others.[u](#)

How do you show respect to teenagers?



Apologize if you do them wrong.



Try to correct their behavior without distorting their personality.

Believing in a teenager's talents and potential is an integral part of love and respect. Abu Talib believed in Muhammad's future, and heard more than one person tell him that Muhammad would grow up to be important. Once, a person when he first saw Muhammad told Abu Talib: "I swear to God, he will be someone important." Another time, a Syrian monk named Bahira, whom Abu Talib and Muhammad encountered while travelling, said: "A great future lies before this nephew of yours."

Aminah felt that her child was unique, and a mother's sense is never wrong. Aminah said, "The boy will be something." Likewise, when

Muhammad went to live in his grandfather's house, Abdul-Mutallib had the same feeling, and said virtually the same thing, as did a fortuneteller Muhammad's uncle encountered.

As we said earlier, teenagers are full of energy and potential, but this potential will not come to fruition unless the teen herself feels there is an environment that appreciates and believes in her.

You might disagree with much of what your teenager does, but this cannot mean not respecting his potential and believing in his future if he puts his energy to use.

It is true that the Syrian monk Bahira who said "A great future lies before this nephew of yours" was referring to Muhammad's future role as Prophet, and equally true that your own child will not be a prophet. But this does not mean that he or she will not one day be a Steve Jobs or Malala Yousafzai, and you should treat and believe in him or her accordingly.

Outside the home

We have learned that the Prophet Muhammad lived in a stable

household built on love and respect, and how vital this is for teenagers. Nonetheless, many people tend to see teen problems as originating outside the home, from the street, or school or friends. This is not completely accurate, but it does have some truth to it.

Technology has wiped out the dividing lines between the home and the outside world, as the internet and smart phones allow a teenager to do in his own bedroom what he could only previously do outside.

The challenges of parenthood are no longer the same as those of the 7th century, because bad friends can exert an influence not just in the street or school, but at home too, through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and countless other means.

Nonetheless, the principles of parenting are the same, and how to deal with teenagers is essentially unchanged, and still starts by building a teenager's character at home since childhood, to make him able to handle temptations outside the home, even if those temptations come in different, more advanced forms.

The home and the teenager's relationship with her parents remains the cornerstone of parenting, without ignoring the complex changes

that have taken place in our day and age.

We will now look at Muhammad's movement outside the home: with friends, at work, and while travelling. We will see that God protected him both at home and outside the home, through parenting rules that can benefit us as well.

Among these rules is that the home can guide a teen's behavior in the street, far out of sight of the family, by building up her conscience and piety.

Now on to Muhammad's friendships during his teenage years.

Peer pressure

The most important environmental influences on character are not parents but peers, and friends are extremely important in adolescence.^{[12](#)}

Muhammad, of course, had friends as well as a teenager, but since we don't know how many there were or their names, how can we get to know them?

Most likely they would have been members of the Quraysh tribe. They also probably would have been from the same neighborhood he lived in, because the members of a single tribe lived close together, and as a young boy he had played with the neighbors' children. It is only natural that a teenager with such friendships outside the home will be confronted with difficult moral challenges, which is what worries parents about their teenagers' friends.

The Prophet Muhammad recalled: "I was with some Quraysh boys, and we were carrying stones for some game. We were all naked, because every boy had put his loincloth around his neck to carry stones in it, and I had done the same as them. When I was walking around like that, something which I couldn't see dealt me a painful blow and said 'Put your loincloth on.' So I put it back on and carried the stones on my neck, the only one of the group still wearing a loincloth."

This story illustrates the timeless influence of what we now call peer pressure on teenagers, which can comprise a major source of psychological and emotional pressure.

Conscience

What happened in this story is seen by Muslims as divine providence, protecting the young Prophet Muhammad. So how can a normal teenager under negative peer pressure save himself?

It was widespread and completely normal in his society for boys carrying something heavy to take off their loincloths and carry the objects around their necks. Divine intervention here can be seen as a substitute for the family playing an effective role.

Divine intervention won't happen to every teen the way it happened for Muhammad, and families need to raise their teenagers with a conscience that whispers to their teenager and counteracts negative peer pressure, telling him not to smoke, do drugs, catcall girls, etc.

If a teenager makes one mistake, her conscience will "deal her a painful blow," as physically happened to Muhammad, and prevent the mistake from becoming engrained as a habit.

Parenting by example

In his book, *How to Behave So Your Children Will Too*, Sal Severe

describes how a child's conscience appears during preschool and is developed with help from the parents. Eventually it can help children choose between right and wrong (Severe, 104-05). With patience and constant guidance, a child gradually begins to incorporate his parents' voice inside himself, making it part of his being. If that child is tempted to misbehave, that voice will be the incentive to do the right thing afterwards. Building a sharp conscience is what makes teenagers trustworthy and reliable.

How to build a teen's conscience?



Be nice to her when she makes a mistake, and show your pride in her achievements, because this will help build her self-confidence.



Help him find friends that share your

principles and will guide him in your absence.



Build her ability to say “No,” and stick to her principles, even if others don’t like it.

Attraction to the opposite sex

It is also only natural for your teenager to experience sexual desire. The challenge is not to try to prevent this desire — that is innately human — but rather to guide it. The Prophet himself said on this topic:

I was not interested in women like people in the pre-Islamic age were, except for two nights when God Almighty safeguarded me. One night I was with some boys in Mecca, when we were shepherding their flock. I said to my friend, ‘Watch over my sheep, so I can go spend a night in Mecca the way boys do.’ He said okay,

so I went in. When I reached the first house in Mecca, I heard music with tambourines and flutes. I sat down to watch, and God struck me on my ears, and I swear He did not wake me up until the sunrise. Another night, I told him, ‘Watch over my sheep, so I can go spend a night in Mecca.’ When I came to Mecca, I heard something like I’d heard the other night. I sat down to watch, and God struck me on my ears and I swear He did not wake me up until the sunrise. After those two [nights], I swear I did not go back for any of that.

Muhammad twice tried to attend a party, but was blocked both times by God rendering him unconscious, which was divine protection for the future prophet. So how can your teenager learn from this story?

The interesting part of the story is not that Muhammad as a teen wanted to go to a party, or wanted to go twice, but rather that he didn’t try a third time. This can be inspirational for teenagers. How?

God Almighty chooses not to stop evil, but He sometimes makes it more difficult. A teenager will often stumble in his first attempt at wrongdoing, because God does not want him to think that this

difficult path is easy, and puts roadblocks in the way that could dissuade him once or twice.

For example, he might fall sick the day he was planning to travel somewhere inappropriate, or the internet could suddenly cut off, or he could be stopped by a coughing fit upon trying his first cigarette.

A teen could either mistake these roadblocks as natural, random coincidences that could happen to anyone, or — depending on her upbringing — could understand that this was a divine warning shot across the bow, and will change her behavior the second or third time.

The role of parents, then, is to encourage their teenager to develop this mentality, so that if she does slip up, her conscience will spring to life and stop her from making a habit of it. This is what makes a teenager trustworthy and reliable.

God hit Muhammad on his ears and knocked him out cold before he could attend the party. Be aware of the fact that obstacles in your attempts to go astray are a message from God telling you that He loves you and doesn't want you to join the dark side.

Understand the meaning behind the impediments. These are no run-of-the-mill difficulties of the kind that can happen to anyone.

Work

In the rest of the chapter, we will talk about Muhammad's work and travel, and how teenagers can benefit from this.

The Prophet started out his career as a shepherd, working to help his uncle, Abu Talib, and build up his own personal experience. Muhammad said in one hadith: "There is no prophet that didn't work as a shepherd."

Shepherding is not as easy as finding food and water for livestock; it is work that requires a number of personal skills and attributes:

- **Leadership:** Determining what path to take the flock and when to stop to graze.

- Integrity: Honest management of the sheep, and not betraying the trust of the owner, such as by drinking their milk without permission.
- Focus: If your attention strays, a sheep could easily be lost or stolen.
- Compassion: Building a friendly, compassionate relationship with the flock, such that you know your sheep one by one.
- Perseverance: Being able to tolerate harsh weather and shepherding for long hours.

Scholars have labeled the five regions around the world with the highest proportion of centenarians “Blue Zones.” These areas with noticeably longer average lifespans include islands in Japan and Greece, and the Italian island of Sardinia.

National Geographic noted that this geographically diverse range of regions shared certain features, including a lifestyle emphasizing family life, not smoking, and physical activity. The magazine added that the elderly do not stop being physically active in these Blue Zones, and stay busy with low-stress jobs, such as shepherding.

This, of course, is not to promote shepherding as the ideal career for your teenager. But rather it suggests that if teens live healthy lifestyles they will also be more at peace psychologically.

Let’s move on to travel, and how it enriches a teenager’s experience.

Travel

Generally speaking, teenagers hate routine and love change and travel. At the age of only 13, Muhammad insisted on joining his uncle on a trip to Syria.

The trip from Mecca to Syria was grueling for someone at this tender age, covering some 1,500 kilometers and lasting 20 to 30 days. Even those who have travelled from Mecca to Damascus by car on paved roads complain about how exhausting the trip is. Now imagine it by

camel.

Even though teenagers are full of life and love adventures, this must have been a hard journey for Muhammad. He was unused to traveling such huge distances, and also could have grown bored, particularly as the only teenager in the trade caravan.

We do not know exactly how the travelers spent their time on the trip, or what landmarks they saw along the way, but there is a strong possibility they would have seen the following:

- Historical landmarks: Mada'in Saleh, in what is now northwestern Saudi Arabia, a city carved out of stone by the Nabatean civilization, similar to its better known sister Petra in modern-day Jordan, all ruins where the Roman Emperor Trajan would have walked, when he brought an end to the Nabatean civilization in the second century; Sodom and Gomorrah near Jericho; and paved Roman roads in modern-day Jordan.

- Diverse topography and climates: the mountains and plains of the Hejaz around Mecca; the wetlands of Wadi Sarhan, now near the Jordanian-Saudi border; the Nefud, an enormous oval depression and desert; and the cave of the seven sleepers in Jordan. The caravan made its way from the northern Arabian Peninsula running parallel to the Red Sea, and crossed the Nefud Desert to Bosra in southern Syria.

- Different societies and religions: the polytheists of Hejaz, the Jewish community in Medina, the Arab Christians in the Lakhmid, Banu Judham, and Ghassanid tribes, and monasteries along the way, including the one home to the monk Bahira.

The challenge for today's teenagers is no longer travel itself, since it has become affordable and relatively easy. Rather, the challenge is how teenagers (or people of any age) use travel to develop themselves and their personal capabilities.

Muhammad was able to use his trip to Syria to see firsthand historical and religious landmarks; to encounter cultures, languages, and customs in the markets he visited with his uncle in Syria; to meet the monk Bahira, etc.

It is very important for teens to be open to meeting people from other cultures with different life experiences and equally critical for teens to be always looking for an opportunity to enrich their experience.

The following table will remind you of how a teenager can make the most of her teenager years, and how Muhammad was able to safely make it through the difficulties of adolescence.

Lessons from Muhammad's adolescence

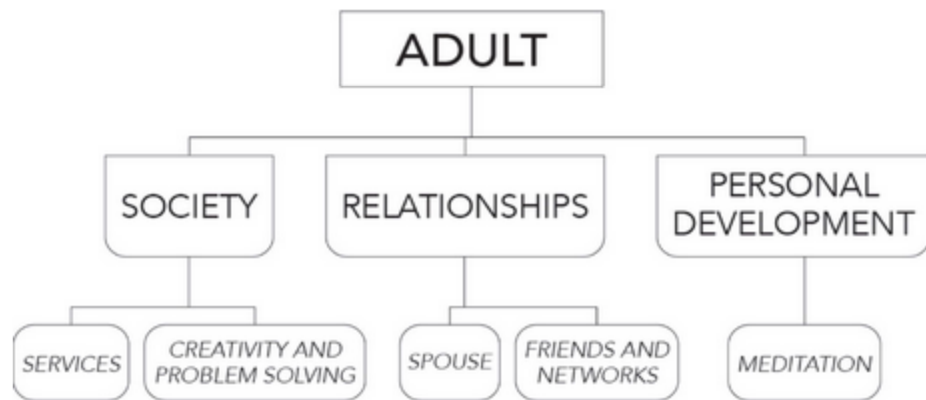
Muhammad's adolescence	Your adolescence
At home	
Muhammad worked as a shepherd to help his uncle's family.	Help your parents, even if they don't ask you directly for help.

Muhammad did not eat too fast, especially when eating with a group.	Be patient and be polite and friendly in your requests.
Muhammad always kept his hair combed and his appearance tidy.	Take care of your overall appearance, even if you're at home with the family.
Outside the home	
God protected Muhammad in the form of a voice rebuking him to put his loincloth back on.	Let your internal voice and conscience tell you what is right and wrong, and be trustworthy, even if you are far from parental or otherwise supervision
God safeguarded Muhammad from going down the wrong path, and Muhammad learned his lesson.	God may not be so overt, so you have to watch for signs of His protection.

Muhammad asked the monk Bahira to not make him swear by the pagan's goddesses.	Do not imitate others just because they are the majority, and express your beliefs politely.
Muhammad traveled to Syria, and was the youngest person in the caravan.	Expose yourself to new adventures and enrich your experience with what you see.

¹¹ For further tips, see: Biddulph. *Raising Boys*, and *Raising Girls*, by the same author.

¹² Shenk, p. 112.



In brief

Adults who have learned from unique experiences since adolescence are expected to share what they have gained with their societies and communities. Muhammad in his 20s and 30s supported his uncle's family and used his people skills and creativity to resolve conflicts in

his town, Mecca. But although he was socially active and enjoyed a network of special friends, he was able to withdraw and meditate without feeling lonely or bored. In a busy age of technology and social networks, young adults must be able to strike a balance between being active in society and finding the time and space to reflect and contemplate.

Chapter 5

Muhammad as A Young Adult

Be creative

In the last chapter, we looked at Muhammad as a teenager — how he was able to counter challenges and channel his energy productively, gaining experience from work and travel.

In this chapter, we look at Muhammad in his 20s and 30s, the age when one is able to put accumulated experience to use and serve society.

Muhammad became a rising star in Mecca, drawing attention for his problem solving skills when he came up with an inventive solution to resolve a dispute within the Quraysh tribe while the Kaaba was being built.

As a merchant, he gained a reputation for scrupulous integrity and the trust of his customers. After he earned the admiration of an esteemed businesswoman, Khadija, the two got married and built a family of four daughters and two sons.

A realistic model

The most inspiring thing about Muhammad's adolescent years was his readiness to bear responsibility from a young age. He worked as a shepherd to help support his uncle's family and traveled to Syria to gain experience. As a young adult, Muhammad proved to be gifted in his people skills, dealing with others effectively but without relinquishing his own principles in order to please them.

Some Muslims imagine the Prophet Muhammad to have been above humankind, a claim that can lead to inherent contradictions.

For instance, the same person might quote the Qur'an, which says: "Indeed, there is an excellent example for you in the Messenger of God" (33:73). But then they turn around and say that Muhammad is inimitable, because he was a prophet!

Out of their deep and genuine respect for the Prophet, some Muslims feel there is no connection between his life and their lives, and that the story of the Prophet's life is meant to inspire awe, not give realistic examples of how we can all be better people.

We have come to the point where we read about the Prophet's life and are overcome by reverence more than we see in it an example of how we can live our own lives.

The challenge here is to strike the right balance between respect for the Prophet Muhammad and considering his life a practical source of everyday inspiration.

The solution is to think of Muhammad as the best a human can be, and for that to encourage us to improve ourselves to be as close to the

Prophet's example as possible.

Even though you may feel that there is a wide gap between what the Prophet Muhammad did with his life and what you have done with yours so far, see this as a motivation, not a source of frustration. Don't freeze in place, thinking you're never going to be able to do as much good as the Prophet did.

Muhammad was an outstanding person, even before he became Prophet. The Qur'an describes him as being "of great moral character" (68:4), in one of the first verses ever revealed to him, while he was still living in Mecca. It is only natural that the Prophet's moral character did not form after this verse was revealed, but rather had formed over many years. So we can infer that Muhammad was a deeply moral person even before he became Prophet, a trait that of course was further enhanced by becoming Prophet.

Muhammad was 25 years old when he married Khadija, who told him that she loved him for his mercy, honesty and truthfulness — morals Muhammad had before he received God's revelation.¹³

To start imagining what Muhammad was like as a young man, let's

start with his physical appearance, since a person's appearance generally changes during childhood, before the facial features become more defined as a young adult.

We can focus on his face and movement, because this is the first thing that draws our attention with any person.

What did Muhammad look like?

Available sources describe Muhammad's appearance as follows:

He had a round and bright handsome face with a white reddish complexion and smooth cheeks with no projections. He had large reddish-black eyes with long eyelashes, white teeth and a husky voice. He had a sizable head and his hair was of medium length. It did not reach his shoulders, and it was not too short either. When he delayed cutting his hair, it would grow to his shoulders, and when he cut his hair, he would cut it up to his ears, or half way down to his earlobes.

He was of medium height and build, with broad shoulders, a flat stomach and heavy hands with thick fingers and toes. His legs and

other limbs were straight and long. The arches on his feet could hardly touch the ground. When he walked, he walked briskly with strength of purpose, lifting each foot clearly off the ground (not like those who walk with an air of ostentation), and he walked at ease when he was not in a hurry. When he walked, he walked calmly, humbly, and steadily leant forward as if descending a slope.

His movement was quick, and when he turned, he did so with his whole body, not just his head. His drops of perspiration looked like pearls as far as their clarity and whiteness are concerned, and his smell was better than the fragrance of musk and ambergris.¹⁴

You may say, why does appearance matter? Nobody can judge a book by its cover, so why does Muhammad's appearance matter at all?

There are of course some aspects of Muhammad that could be considered a gift from God Almighty, but there are things that you can change in your life, inspired by Muhammad's physical appearance.

Your teeth might not be naturally evenly spaced like his were, but you can pay attention to dental hygiene to keep them white and

clean. Likewise, your natural odor might not be musky, as the Prophet's was (which was a unique attribute of his), but you can wash and bathe frequently.

The goal then is for you to see what aspects of the Prophet's life can be beneficial, such as cleanliness and taking care of your appearance.

Here are other examples of what we mean:

Mohammed's appearance	Your appearance
Muhammad had tidy hair.	Comb your hair.
Muhammad was not overweight	Exercise and eat healthy.
Muhammad had clean white teeth.	Protect your teeth from cavities and yellowing.

None of these should be revelations to you, but it is all too easy to forget to make simple preventive measures — like flossing or exercise — part of your daily routine.

Muhammad's personality

What may inspire you most about Muhammad's personality is the balance he found. He mingled with people easily, formed a strong network of friendships, and put forward creative initiatives to help his community. But at the same time he did not immerse himself completely in the concerns of daily life, or forget his need for reflection alone.

We will look firstly at how Muhammad interacted with his local community.

In 591, the merchant town of Mecca was rocked by a dispute. A prominent local businessman named Al-Aas ibn Wael had conned a Yemeni merchant of his goods without paying for them, and the Yemeni pleaded with the leaders of Mecca to intervene.

Local leaders went to Al-Aas's house and obliged him to give over the

money he owed. To prevent such wrongs from occurring again and hurting Mecca's trade-based economy, the town leaders came to an agreement known as the "League of the Virtuous": a pact to safeguard fair commercial transactions, even for merchants who like the Yemeni trader had no local tribes to protect them.

Even though Muhammad was only 21 years old, he joined the older leaders who met in the house of Abdullah Jud'an, a prominent tribal elder, to form the pact. Muhammad was there not only as an observer, but was a vocal supporter of the pact.

Muhammad would recall this event, decades later, saying: "I witnessed a pact in the house of Abdullah Jud'an to which, if I had been called upon during the time of Islam, I would have responded."

The lesson here is to be concerned with issues in your community, and to play a positive role in its evolution, whatever age you are and whatever the nature of your contribution. Rather than thinking you are perhaps too young to make a difference, develop your personality and you will find yourself among older leaders.

Creativity

Muhammad thought up creative ideas for the problems facing his society, which happened when the Meccans wanted to rebuild the Kaaba but disagreed over which tribe would have the honor of putting the black stone in its place (the Arabs at the time believed that the black stone had descended from heaven, and worshipped it, beginning their circumambulation around the Kaaba at the black stone. Heavy flooding in Mecca in 605 AH had destroyed the Kaaba's structure).

At their wits' end to find a compromise, the tribes eventually agreed to have the next person to enter the sacred Haram area act as judge and make a ruling on the problem.

Muhammad was 35 years old at the time, which for the Arabs would still have been young to be resolving conflicts, a role almost always assigned to tribal elders. Nonetheless, the Arabs agreed to let Muhammad tackle the problem when he happened to be the next person to step into the Haram.

Muhammad quickly solved the problem by putting the black stone on an *abaya* (cloak), then having representatives of each tribe hold a

corner of the cloak and lift it up one meter off the ground. Together they put the black stone in its place. According to Constantin Gheorghiu, “Muhammad’s way of thinking indicated his genius, and if he had not been a genius, then he would not have been a prophet.”¹⁵

Muhammad’s solution was both creative and spontaneous. The problem was unprecedented, because this was the first time the Meccans had renovated the Kaaba, and the dispute lasted for a full five days. Muhammad, even though he had not expected to be involved, was able to solve the disagreement on the spot by creative thinking.

Being able to think on his feet and overcome groupthink within each of the quarreling tribes shows Muhammad’s genius.

Creativity and thinking out of the box have become highly sought-after skills, because in an ever-changing world, survival is assured not for those who are good at imitation, or that stick to the same routine, but for innovators and those flexible enough to adapt to unforeseen changes.

For this reason, the number of books and educational materials on innovation has surged, while fostering creativity, critical thinking, and innovation have become part of most modern teaching and training methodologies.¹⁶

do you become Creative?



See new links between things.



Set aside what you’ve learned if it’s no longer valid and be ready to learn again.



Put yourself among innovators by meeting

them and learning about their accomplishments.

Conflict management

What Muhammad did in this incident was not easy, and helped prevent a tribal war that could have broken out at any time. The dispute had lasted for five days and was on the verge of turning to violence. (Remember from [chapter three](#) that Qusay's clan was on the brink of war with itself over who would manage the affairs of the Kaaba. Likewise, tribal wars had been a constant occurrence in the past, though someone capable of proposing smart solutions could have prevented them).

How to manage conflict?

- 1. Cooperation: A solution has to be acceptable to all parties (such as the solution for the problem of the black stone in the Kaaba).*
- 2. Concessions: Every side needs to be persuaded to*

make concessions in some way to reach a compromise.

- 3. Mutual gain: Convince others of a certain party's view that you see as being in everyone's interest.*
- 4. Acknowledgement: Don't ignore or sidestep the issues at hand, which can only work in very simple disputes.*

Conflict management has become a highly important skill, whether in the workplace, within the family, or in life generally. Wars have a steep human and economic cost, and people need to live in peace. So our appreciation for people skilled at conflict resolution is perhaps higher than ever.

Work

The Prophet worked for years as a merchant and was upset when he saw that the business world was a merciless environment, unlike shepherding, with more than its share of cheating, fraud and exploitation.

But Muhammad chose neither to withdraw from business nor give in to the status quo and begin imitating the unscrupulous practices around him. Instead, he focused on the good side of business, and steered away from the bad, building a successful partnership with an honest trader named Al-Sa'ib, who had an excellent reputation for being forthright about any flaws in the goods he was selling and not arguing over prices. Muhammad also learned from Al-Sa'ib how to make an honest living in an environment where corruption was a constant temptation.

The Prophet's trustworthiness in commerce is what made the successful businesswoman Khadija offer him a chance to sell her goods in Syria in exchange for a fixed sum. Muhammad agreed, and came back from Syria with profits for Khadija, which proved his honesty as well as skill in buying and selling, and Khadija agreed to double his commission up to 1,600 dirhams each caravan trip, which was a good commission for a young man in his mid-20s.

At the time, a loaf of bread cost six dirhams, camel saddles 13 dirhams, a sheep 40 dirhams, and a camel 400 dirhams. To succeed in business, any trader also needed flexibility, far-sightedness, and the ability to be persuasive, all of which the Prophet clearly had.

Engage in your community

Don't deprive yourself of the opportunities and experiences your community has to offer. Instead of shying away from interacting with your community or claiming that it is a morally unhealthy environment, think of innovative means to achieve your self-improvement goals, while also improving your surroundings as much as you can with your own initiatives. Muhammad did not withdraw from the marketplace, nor did he completely immerse himself in it. Rather, he maintained his principles and found supportive people with whom to interact.

Friends and Networks

Muhammad chose his friends carefully, becoming close friends with cultured, respected people. These included:

- Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq: A man who never drank alcohol or worshipped idols, yet was very social and widely popular in the community.

- Hakim ibn Hizam: An intelligent and generous leader who was responsible for hosting pilgrims.
- Jabra Al-Rumi: A cultured, multilingual Christian who was very knowledgeable about the holy books. As mentioned earlier, he is referenced in the Qur'anic verse, "They say 'It is only a human being who teaches the Prophet'" (16: 103).

The Prophet met Arabs and foreigners, polytheists and Christians, and had friends of different ages (Hakim was five years older than him, while Abu Bakr was two years younger than Muhammad), who were also respected, good people.

Expand your circle of friends wisely, and get to know the good ones better.

Friendship today has become tied to the idea of having a network of friends and contacts. Social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn are based on the idea of connecting between people with shared interests, and that making one friend can open the door

to 10 more.

So the challenge is not just the person whom you meet, but rather the broader network that will come with him.

Choose your network carefully.

When choosing friends



Diversify your friends, meeting people from outside your usual circle.



Expand the network of your relationships. Every relationship will go through ups and downs, and you can avoid feeling lonely.



Review your friendships and ask yourself: Am I a better person with this friendship?

Marriage and family

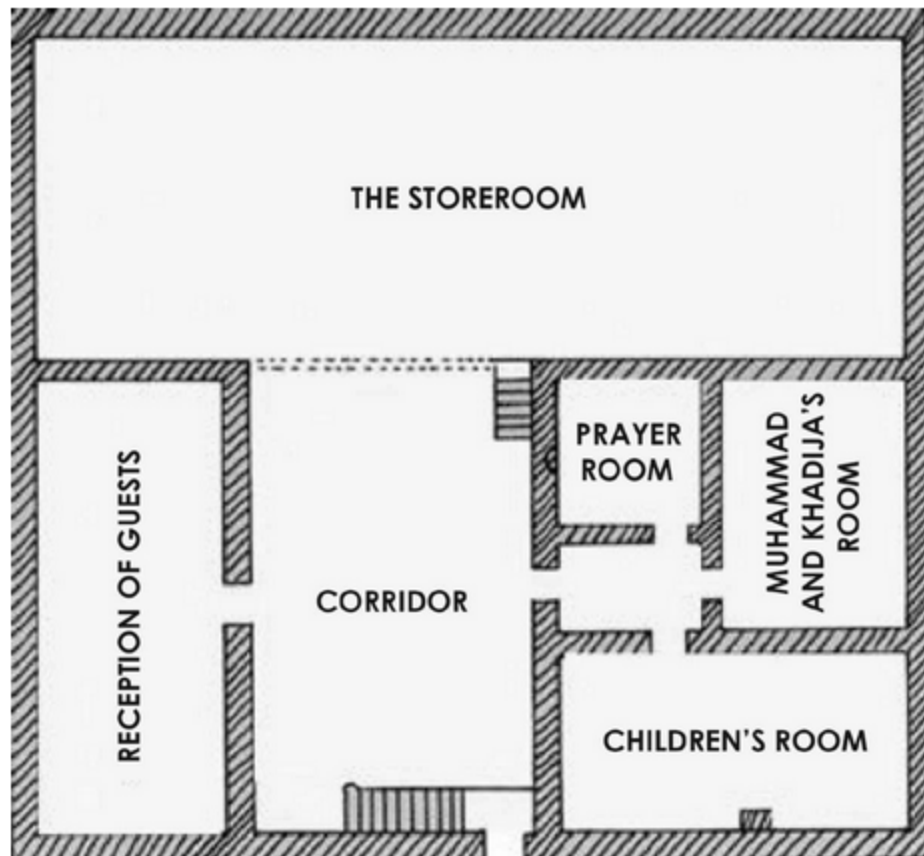
We will now talk about the Muhammad's marital life. For Muslim readers, the information here might be common knowledge, but the point is to illustrate what could be inspirational for you in putting a spark into your own marriage.

Muhammad was 25 years old when he married Khadija. She was older than him, in her late 20s, but was still very attractive in that she was a good-hearted and widely respected person and a successful businesswoman in a deeply patriarchal society.

Muhammad lived two years in his grandfather's house, 17 years in his uncle's house, and then 28 years in his wife's house until he emigrated from Mecca at the age of 53. This illustrates how influential Khadija was in his life.

We now have information about Khadija's house, thanks to excavations in Mecca in 1989. Khadija's house was a single-story, two-bedroom house. One six-meter by four-meter bedroom was for Muhammad and Khadija, and a second seven-meter by four-meter bedroom was for the children. There was also a 10-meter by four-meter room for receiving guests, while the largest room (16 meters by seven meters) was a storeroom for Khadija's business, and possibly for any valuables Muhammad was storing.

Figure 2. Muhammed's house in Mecca



Muhammad lived for 28 years in the house of his wife Khadija during which some of his children — like Fatima — were born. He also received his early revelations here.¹⁷

Muhammad took on the responsibilities of parenting before having any children of his own, since Khadija had married twice before him and had two sons and a daughter. Muhammad treated her son Hind as if he were his father, not his stepfather with the sometimes negative meaning that word has taken on in this age.

He treated his wife Khadija not according to a thinking of rights and duties, but out of virtue, as mentioned in the Qur'an with regards to marital relations: "And do not forget kindness between you" (2:237).

Out of kindness, Khadija agreed to let Muhammad's cousin Ali live with them, and treated him like her own son, and continued to do so even after Ali married her daughter, Fatima (treating him like a mother, not like a mother-in-law — which has a negative connotation in nearly all cultures). The recipe for a happy married life, therefore, is love, respect, mutual understanding and kindness.

The mutual understanding between married couples extends,

automatically, to their children when they grow up and get married. Ali and Fatima grew up in the same household as Khadija and Muhammad, and when Ali married Fatima, they provided the same environment of family understanding and stability to their children, Hassan and Hussein.

In turn, when Hassan and Hussein each got married, they also recreated the same healthy family environment.

Mutual understanding, then, is not only a blessing for the husband and wife, but also a gift that keeps on giving to the children and grandchildren.

In this table, you can find some suggestions for what married couples can learn from Muhammad and Khadija's marriage and in how they treated each other.

Muhammad	Husband
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Muhammad helped out around the house, serving both himself and his family.	Help out at home — don't think that this somehow detracts from your masculinity.
Muhammad was always busy, yet spent countless hours strengthening his relationship with his children.	Give time to your children, regardless of how demanding your job is. Do not leave parenting to your wife alone.
Muhammad was generous to Khadija's family and relatives. He took care of her son from a previous marriage as well as her sister Hala, while becoming close friends with her nephew Hakim.	Be as kind to your in-laws as you can with visits, gifts, good treatment, etc.).
Khadija	Wife
God promised Muhammad's wife Khadija a special place in heaven because she created such calm, loving environment at home.	Help create a comfortable home and know that this will positively affect everyone's relationships and spirits.

Khadija was not perplexed by Muhammad going to meditate alone outside the home, and supported this regular practice.	Appreciate your husband's needs and help him to be a better person, just as he should do for you
Khadija was generous to Muhammad's family and relatives, and treated his cousin, Ali ibn Abi Talib, like her own son	Be as kind as you can to your husband's family, respect his parents and treat them well.

Beliefs and values

We've noted that Muhammad stayed engaged within his community, speaking up against wrongs and offering brilliant solutions to resolve conflicts. He was open to befriending people from a wide range of religious and ethnic backgrounds.

We also discussed what he was like at home, with his wife and family. Muhammad did not abandon his principles in the face of social pressure. He was a strong, independent person with his own beliefs, and dedicated time to meditating on his own.

Muhammad stayed engaged within his community, but without feeling the need to conform to the beliefs of the majority just because they were the majority. Muhammad did not drink alcohol or gamble, and refused to do anything that violated the idea in the Qur'an that he was "of great moral character."

In fact, his beliefs were closer to that of members of the religious minorities of his day, such as the monotheists. Even this was not out of blind imitation, the way some people may try out a different religion out of curiosity. Rather, it stemmed from a growing conviction he had from the age of 12, when he rebuked the monk Bahira for asking him to swear by the pagan gods most Meccans held sacred.

The Prophet Muhammad based his beliefs on his own convictions and did not seek to fit in with either the polytheist majority or the monotheist minority. This was not out of a youthful desire to rebel or go against the grain, but rather out of true conviction.

Let this inspire you to have an independent personality, regardless of social pressures trying to make you fit into a predefined mold.

Religious practice

There is very little information on how Muhammad worshipped before he became Prophet, but we know that the monotheists and polytheists in Mecca did have some shared practices, which are believed to have been the remnants of Abraham's religion that survived over the ages. It is thought that Muhammad would have observed some of these practices:

- Prayer: The method of prayer included kneeling and prostration. The monotheist Zayd ibn Amr was known to prostrate and say, "I seek refuge in that which Abraham sought refuge."
- Fasting: The Quraysh tribe would fast on the tenth day of the Muharram month, and Muhammad did so as well.
- Pilgrimage: Muhammad circumambulated around the Kaaba, walked between the hills of Safa and

Marwa, and stood at Mount Arafat, all now part of the Islamic pilgrimage known as the *hajj*, but did not follow the Quraysh rites that were explicitly polytheistic.

Seclusion: The Quraysh would sometimes go into seclusion for meditation and prayer. Omar ibn al-Khattab, before he converted to Islam, would go into seclusion at the Kaaba.

Muhammad undertook the practices he saw as part of Abraham's religion, and that were incorporated into Islam.^{[18](#)}

Meditation and busy lives

Muhammad would set aside time to be on his own, away from his family and all others, in a cave three kilometers from the outskirts of Mecca and not to leave it except to get food.

We do not have any kind of diary about his time alone, but know that he spent it in introspection, also gazing upon the Kaaba, which was visible at a distance from the cave.

The cave, known as either Hira', or the mountain of light, is 620 meters above sea level and has a narrow opening into a small crevice, and barely has room for one person to stretch out and lie down. Remarkably, Muhammad would stay for up to a month in this location, despite how desolate it was, especially at night.

Take time for yourself

Staying alone in a tiny cave away from the world does not sound like most people's idea of fun. Secluding oneself is bearable at home or in a mosque, but off in the middle of nowhere is much tougher. Yet Muhammad regularly did this, eventually for one month out of the year, without being afraid or bored, because he possessed the ability to immerse himself deep in thought until he lost his sense of time and place.

This is a rare ability, especially in our hyper-connected world where being alone usually means staring at a computer or a smartphone, which is entirely different from seclusion for the purpose of meditation.

Do not misunderstand this as a call to shut yourself away from

society; Muhammad was deeply involved in his community, as we saw earlier. Rather, try to develop your ability to meditate, which in turn involves seclusion.

Cell phones have eaten away at our ability to concentrate, and are omnipresent, whether as factors in car crashes or ringing loudly at inopportune times in the mosque. Families have quickly become used to living in separate worlds under a single roof, due to information technology.

Be inspired by Muhammad's example in how he was able to enjoy his seclusion without feeling lonely or bored.

Turn off your phone and try meditation or introspection, even if just for one hour.

We've reached the end of our chapter on Muhammad when he was in his 20s and 30s. We discussed how he was deeply involved in solving his community's problems; how kindness and mercy were at the heart of his marriage with Khadija; and how he was independent and meditative in his personal life.

The following table will remind you of the most important lessons we

can learn from the Prophet when he was a young adult.

Lessons from Muhammad as young adult

Mohammad's life	Your life
Society	
Muhammad was positive and involved, taking the initiative to fix problems he saw in his community, such as taking part in the "League of the Virtuous".	Be positive, and take initiative, regardless of your age and the type of input you can offer.
Muhammad was creative in his ways to solve society's problems, such as in the dispute over the black stone	Be creative. Don't underestimate your ability to come up with novel solutions
Muhammad was open-minded, befriending respectable and decent people from diverse backgrounds	Be open-minded. Broaden your circle of contacts, and build relationships with those who would inspire you.

Marriage	
Muhammad he had a happy family life built on mutual understanding and kindness.	Approach marriage with a mindset of considering the other person's needs and feelings, not just what each person's rights and responsibilities are.
Muhammad	Yourself
Muhammad went into seclusion to meditate, setting aside a specific time (eventually, one month a year) to be alone and to think.	Meditate and reflect on your mission in life. Think about who you are and what you want to become.

¹³ Darouza, p. 211.

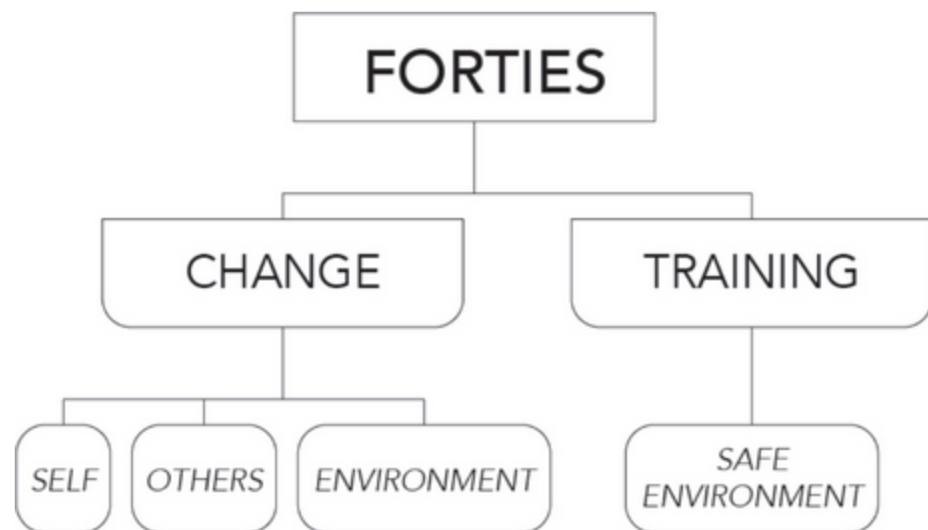
¹⁴ Salahi, p. 49.

¹⁵ Gheorghiu, p. 41.

¹⁶ See: Gladwell, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*; Lehrer, *Imagine: How Creativity Works*; and Arden, *The Book of Doing: Everyday Activities to Unlock Your Creativity and Joy*.

¹⁷ The above illustration of the House was drawn according to the description of Batnuni, *Al-Rehlah Al-Hijaziyya (The Hijazi journey)*.

¹⁸ Most of the information here about Muhammad's style of worship is from the Arabic-language book *The Age of the Prophet (Peace be upon Him) and His Environment before the Mission*, by Mohammed Ezzat Darouza.



In brief

In our fast-paced life, flexibility to change is a much valued habit of

mind and attitude. Most people fail to change not because they don't believe in the importance of change, but because they fear the uncertainty of leaving their comfort zone for a completely new and unfamiliar territory. When reaching the age 40, Muhammad went through profound changes that transformed his life, the lives of his friends, and his community. This was the period when he received the revelation and left Mecca to settle in Medina. Change is a process, not an event, and requires patience, dedication and practice.

Chapter 6

Muhammad in his 40s

Adapting to change

Muhammad's childhood was a stage of growth and emotional fulfillment. His adolescence was when he utilized his energies to gain experience. And as a young man he added to his experience while

serving his community.

Muhammad's 40s, the subject of this chapter, was a time when he went through profound changes and learned to cope with unexpected events.

We will see the word "change" throughout this chapter, because Muhammad witnessed many — not only in his own life but also in the lives of family and friends, who changed along with him.

In this chapter, we will talk about Muhammad's life during this critical stage, as well as those around him who have their own stories that can inspire you to change for the better.

Change is not easy, and requires training — another keyword in this chapter. Some people underestimate the importance of training for change, believing that change takes place simply through absorbing information whereas in fact it requires adapting one's behavior to get used to a new era after any given change.

In this chapter, we will also look at the reasons that push people to change — particularly going through a deeply influential situation that helps create a desire to change. We will see this in the stories of

many people who changed as a result of a conversation with the Prophet.

We will talk about the importance of change, especially living in our age of fast-paced change, along with the importance of flexibility and giving up habits that have become outdated and could obstruct you from adapting to an evolving reality.

We will also address change within the first Qur'anic verses revealed in Mecca about the first converts to Islam — how these verses addressed their hearts and minds, the position of those polytheists who were opposed to change and their argument for rejecting it, and why many people in general are afraid of or reject change.

This chapter will end by looking at the importance of changing some of our habits and circumstances if they inherently stifle change and self-improvement, illustrating this point with the story of how Muhammad left Mecca for Medina.

Change at 40

Forty is an age that stands as a decisive threshold in a person's life —

a time of change. This is mentioned in the Qur'an, when God said: “[A human] grows until, when he reaches maturity and [the age of] forty years, he says, ‘My Lord, enable me to be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me.’” (46:15).

We will start with the most important transformation in Muhammad's life, which happened when he was 40 years old.

While he was meditating in the same cave outside of Mecca, something extraordinary happened to Muhammad. An angel of God appeared before him, and told Muhammad “Read!” Terrified, Muhammad stammered that he didn't know how to read, and the angel grabbed him and shook him forcefully, repeating again, “Read!” even though there was nothing in front of Muhammad to read.

Muhammad asked the angel, “What should I read?” The angel shook him a second time and said, “Read!” Again, Muhammad replied that he was illiterate. The angel shook him yet again, this time so hard that Muhammad felt like his soul was going to slip out of his body, and said: “Read in the name of your Lord Who has created [all that exists]” (96:1).

This meeting with the angel Gabriel turned Muhammad's life upside down.

The change that Muhammad underwent in the cave was physically painful, from the angel Gabriel squeezing him, yet Muhammad yearned to see Gabriel again, and was worried whenever he did not appear for a long stretch of time. Change can likewise be extremely difficult or painful, because it yanks a person out of her comfort zone into unfamiliar territory.

But once she grows used to the new situation the pain passes. People are not inherently hesitant about change itself, but fear the pain that accompanies it.

You, too, must be ready to tolerate pain and pay a price in order to come out ahead in the end. No major transformation comes easy.

Muhammad was able to make the lives of seven people better in rapid succession: his wife Khadija (55 years old); his daughters Zaynab, Ruqiyya, and Um Kulthum; his cousin Ali Abu Talib (10 years old); the boy who was at one point his adopted son, Zayd Haritha (30 years old); and his friend Abu Bakr (38 years old).

Abu Bakr was also able to change five other people for the better, namely Uthman ibn Affan (34 years old), Abdul-Rahman Ouf (30 years old), Talha Ubaid Allah, Saad ibn Abi Waqqas (19 years old), and Al-Zubayr Al-Awwam (16 years old).

An interesting question to ask here is how did the idea of change take root so quickly among them? And how do ideas generally spread among people?

Ideas spread effectively through people who are known in leadership and management theory as “connectors” — who know how to link between people, and carry inspirational and motivational ideas from one person to another, exactly the way social media does today.

The perfect example of a connector here is Abu Bakr Al-Siddiq, who was able to build connections between people of all ages and backgrounds, such as connecting the teenager Saad with Uthman, who was 34. The number of people convinced of the idea of change quickly doubled from five to 10, and grew to 20 and then 30, as related by the early Islamic historian Ibn Hesham.¹⁹

Now we will get to know some of the people who changed their lives

(in this case, by converting to Islam), because their experiences could be revealing for those trying to turn your own lives around.

We will focus particularly on those who talked about their transformative experiences, and read their stories from a modern perspective that you can relate to your own reality.

Amr Al-Sulami

Amr's change was remarkable for its speed, in that he completely changed his life after an extremely short conversation with the Prophet. The beginning of their conversation was:

Amr: Who are you?

Muhammad: I'm a prophet.

Amr: What's a prophet?

Muhammad: I was sent by God.

Amr: What did He send you for?

Muhammad: To build the ties of kinship, smash idols, and declare the oneness of God.

Amr: I'm your follower.

The amazing thing in the conversation is how quickly Amr changed. This may have been because Amr had been a pre-Islamic monotheist, and so Muhammad's talk of smashing idols would have been understandable and acceptable to him. But many of the monotheists in Arabia did not convert to Islam overnight, so what was different about Amr?

One could always argue that this was guidance from God, but there are also other key factors that played a role in his conversion, including the Prophet's ability to be persuasive in communicating

with others.

Effective communication is not limited to only verbal communication, but also encompasses non-verbal communication. For instance, Muhammad's sincere facial expressions, compassionate tone of voice, and animated body language, which are not conveyed here in the text of the conversation.

A 1996 study by Judee Burgoon has shown that facial muscles alone can convey 20,000 different expressions, and that facial language does not lie. A famous UCLA study in 1967 suggested that 93 percent of communication is non-verbal (55 percent from body movements and 38 percent from voice tone), compared to only seven percent of the effect coming from words themselves.

As one contemporary said about Muhammad: "When I saw his face, I knew that it was not the face of a liar."

To comprehend how Amr and others changed so quickly, also think about what Muhammad did *not* say, and mentally evoke the impact of his facial expressions, voice, and body language as he was talking with each interlocutor.

And now we share the ending of the conversation between Amr and the Prophet:

Amr: I'm your follower.

Muhammad: You cannot do that on this day. Do you not see what state I'm in and what state the people are in? But go back to your people, and if you hear that I have appeared, come to me.

Also notable in this story is that Amr remained a Muslim for more than 10 years without seeing Muhammad, because he had returned to his hometown of Sulaim and only saw Muhammad again when the Prophet settled in Medina.

According to a Hadith, Amr went up to the Prophet when he heard he had moved to Medina, and asked him: "Do you remember me?" To which the Prophet replied, "Yes, you're the one I met in Mecca." This is another sign of how influential their fleeting encounter had been.

Abdullah Masoud

Abdullah originally hailed from the Hudhayl region 45 kilometers east of Mecca, but lived in Mecca, where he had been working as a shepherd since his childhood. The Prophet passed by Abdullah as the latter was out with his flock, and asked him for a drink of sheep's milk. Abdullah said apologetically he could not, because the sheep did not belong to him. Muhammad then asked Abdullah to bring him a young goat, whereupon Muhammad read a verse from the Qur'an and the goat's dry udder filled with enough milk for both Muhammad and Abdullah to drink.

This experience, retold by Abdullah, was his turning point.

How do people change?

The key question in both Abdullah and Amr's cases is how and why some people change so completely so quickly.

Besides the matter of divine guidance, it was also because Muhammad made such a big impact on their feelings.

In their book, *Switch*, Chip and Dan Heath make the argument that people change their convictions and habits when they are affected on the emotional level more than when they are affected on an intellectual level.

This does not mean that logic cannot change people; both emotion and logic have a role, but which one is dominant in the change will influence the nature of the change itself.

Change pushed by intellectual conviction is usually very specific and clearly defined. For example, when you decide to modify your spending habits and put 10 percent of your paycheck into your savings account, you're doing this because you know it will help you buy a house five years down the road.

These rational changes take place following the steps of "Analyze-Think-Change," whereas change driven by emotion follows a different process, namely that of "See-Feel-Change," which is common in major, sweeping personal transformations.

Dan and Chip Heath add:

But when people fail to change, it's not usually because of an understanding problem. Smokers understand that cigarettes are unhealthy, but they don't quit. At some level, we understand this tension. We know there's a difference between knowing how to act and being motivated to act. But when it comes to change the behavior of other people, our first instinct is to teach them something.^{[20](#)}

There are other examples of people who changed due to emotional reasons, due to something they saw or heard that moved them to change for the better.

Tufayl Amr, a leader of the Daws tribe, lived south of Mecca in an area now known as Al-Baha. Tufayl heard Muhammad reciting the Qur'an and was deeply moved, saying: "I've never heard anything better in my life."

When Tufayl Amr converted, he also persuaded his family and a total of 70 other people to convert. (Both the words of the Qur'an and Muhammad's delivery were very powerful).

Dimmad Thaalaba was a well-known witch doctor, supposedly healing people possessed by jinn (demons), or under a spell. His conversion was a 180-degree turn, also inspired by hearing Muhammad recite the Qur'an, and he said: "I have never heard anything like these words."

Abu Dharr was a monotheist from Ghifar region, 250 kilometers north of Mecca. After meeting Muhammad, he announced his conversion on the spot, unafraid of the consequences from the Quraysh and others. According to the Hadith, he was beaten by a mob of polytheists.

The shared factor here in these conversions is that all three were flexible towards the idea of change, because someone who is closed-minded towards change will likely see change as threatening to her world.

All three did not focus on the things that they would give up when they changed (which could be memories, habits, etc) but rather focused on the new lifestyle that they would be living after making this change.

Adapting to change

Rapid change is the most important distinguishing feature of the 21st century (from landlines to mobiles, from encyclopedias to Wikipedia, from shopping in brick-and-mortar stores to online shopping), and this has made flexibility and adaptability crucial skills.^{[21](#)}

Flexibility does not mean only wanting to learn new things, but also the readiness to *unlearn* things that are no longer useful.

Unlearning is difficult, and not everyone is able to do it, especially as we reach a certain age. Unlearning requires an acceptance of change and self-confidence in handling it. According to Professor Bill Lucas:

To thrive in today's world we will need to develop a different view of talent. Gone is the reliance on fixed notions of narrow kinds of intelligence like IQ. In the coming years we will be increasingly interested in how the human mind goes about unlearning stuff so that it can constantly expand its intelligence in a range of different contexts.^{[22](#)}

The ability to unlearn is what was inspiring about both Tufayl and Dimmad's experiences. Tufayl was confident about the challenge of

change, saying, "I can tell good from bad, so what should stop me from listening to this man?" Dimmad had the flexibility to unlearn what he had learned in the past (the practice of witchcraft) for what he realized was the truth, saying: "I have heard fortune-tellers, magicians, and poets speak, but I have never heard anything like these words."

The challenge in change for many people is the pain of leaving something familiar and comforting to take on something completely new and unfamiliar. This was the experience of Abu Dharr, who left behind his former life — having been a bandit preying on passing caravans and robbing travelers — to adopt a new lifestyle.

Leaving a habit is almost always hard, regardless of how much willpower you have, because you can feel nostalgia for past memories, but you cannot feel nostalgia for a future that is new and unknown territory.

Abu Dharr, however, was able to give up his past pleasures (quick money, the power rush from robbing caravans) and turn his thoughts to the future (how to tell the Quraysh he had converted to Islam).

This is a good mental strategy for coping with the challenge of change — do not live with a mentality of yearning for your old habits, but rather eagerly anticipate what your new life promises.

Think about how things will be better for you with your new habit, not about what you will lose if you give up your old habit. Imagine your situation after the change so that your anticipation of change grows and your attachment to the past lessens.

We are not saying that this will make the process of change easy. But it will alleviate the difficulties of transition

Change in the Qur'an

We will talk now about the nature of the rhetoric of change, looking specifically at the earlier chapters of the Qur'an that were revealed while Muhammad was still living in Mecca, and how Meccans reacted.

Three quarters of the chapters of the Qur'an were revealed in Mecca, starting when the angel Gabriel told Muhammad "Read!"

The Meccan chapters affirmed the unity of God and necessity of strong moral values, warned against idol worship, told inspirational stories of the prophets and believers, and spoke of the wonders of heaven and terrors of hell.

The Meccan chapters were fast-paced, much like the speed of change for those who had converted.

Eighty-six of the Qur'an's 114 chapters were revealed in Mecca, including more than 4,000 verses, starting with "Read!" and ending with Surah 83: Al-Mutaffifeen — those who deal in fraud.

The Qur'anic verses did not win over all Meccans, but they did change the minds of a sizeable minority, which is to be expected in the process of such sweeping social change.

How do the majority view change?

Unsurprisingly, the top leaders of Mecca were opposed to change, because they benefited from the status quo.

Every major transformation will have winners and losers, and in this

case much of Mecca's income was derived from the polytheist pilgrimage to the town. Replacing this practice with a monotheistic religion would clearly hurt the town's income and security.

The Qur'an refers to this: "And they say, if we were to follow the guidance with you, we would be swept from our land" (28:57).

Meccans opposed change by:

- Harassing Muslims praying at the Kaaba: "Have you seen those who forbid a servant when he prays?" (96: 9-10).
- Spreading rumors that Muhammad was seeking after power.
- Physically attacking converts, sometimes even killing them. Bilal, for instance, was tortured by the Meccans, while Sumayah was murdered.

As we said earlier, change requires flexibility and focusing on your future life. It also means training in the new skills that are necessary for change — a key component of this chapter.

We will learn now what the new converts to Islam did in order to train for their new lives.

The importance of training

The converts trained at the house of a Muslim named Al-Arqam over the course of three years.

Training is important in any process to ensure its stability, because becoming used to a new lifestyle comes with practice, not lessons and lecturing. We will discuss the importance of training through recreating what would happen in Al-Arqam's house.

Al-Arqam's house was later known as the Al-Khuzayran house, after an Abbasid princess who converted it into a mosque — one that no longer exists today due to the expansion of the Haram in Mecca.

Al-Arqam house could hold up to 40 people who met with

Muhammad to learn, worship, and train in the needs of their new life, as well as on how to win over new converts.

Training is practicing what you have learned, and both learning and practicing are important. The challenge in the 21st century, however, is no longer simply learning, but also training to apply what we learn.

If we assume that the converts met two hours a day in Al-Arqam house for three years, we are talking about more than 2,000 hours spent on worship, learning, and training in the sense of practicing, until reach complete competence in the new behavior.

Real change does not come only through learning, but also through training. Do not underestimate the importance of training, including attending training sessions to build up your own skills.

Some people underestimate training's role and focus instead solely on increasing their information, which is not necessarily reflected in their skills, such as being hard-working, a good listener, and an effective communicator.

Some people feel embarrassed by training, not liking to appear as if they have lost a certain skill. However, the epitome of courage is to

put oneself in a difficult position in order to make oneself a better person.

A smart trainer should encourage you and push you to develop yourself, but without embarrassing you in front of others.

A safe environment

A smart trainer will provide a safe environment in which trainees can make mistakes, try time and time again, and admit their lack of experience in the particular skillset without fearing consequences.

This is the environment the trainees found in Al-Arqam house, where Muhammad provided guidance with quiet, understanding observations, without picking on anyone personally, but rather focusing on the behavior to be improved — such as teaching the proper way to pray.

The Prophet created a safe environment in which trainees did not have to fear making mistakes or being ridiculed, thereby allowing for improvement.

The safe environment in Al-Arqam house should be present at any training course, allowing repeated efforts and for you to focus on utilizing your energy, instead of how much you already know.

Change your circumstances

In talking about change and the importance of training during the change process, we focused on a person's change. A person might also be forced to change her environment, which is what the Prophet Muhammad did when he left Mecca to live in Medina, and what other converts did when they settled in Ethiopia.

Before we discuss how to change your environment, and how to benefit from the experience of those who changed their environments and lived in Ethiopia, let us give you a little background on their experience, because it is an interesting story that might benefit you in your aspiration to change yourself or your surroundings.

Ethiopia

Over 100 Meccans lived in Ethiopia, 21 of them residing there permanently, while the rest stayed for a few years before moving to Medina.

We do not know for sure how they adjusted to their new environment, but we do know that they lived together in the same neighborhood and were careful to keep their values alive in their children who were born and raised there (inspiration for the 44 million Muslims living in Europe and the four million in Canada and the US).

Jaafar ibn Abi Talib, a 27-year-old young man, was able to convince the Ethiopian leader Al-Najashi to convert to Islam with his eloquent speech and wonderful recitation of the Qur'anic chapter about Mary.

So what can be learnt from the early Muslims in Ethiopia?

Make the most of it: the converts benefitted from their new environment. Al-Zubin learned how to swim, while a girl named Ammi became fluent in the local language.

You, too, can make the most out of the opportunities available in your surroundings.

Be engaged: the converts lived in the same place to stay together, and as a minority kept their identity alive. Likewise, put yourself with people who will support you.

Change your attitude

Changing your environment does not necessarily mean moving to a new country. You can also change an attitude that is impeding you from improving yourself.

When we tell you not to lose your temper as much, or to quit smoking, or to watch your weight, we mean to *change your attitude* that is making you lose your temper, smoke, or eat too much.

You can do this staying in your hometown.

Muhammad spent his 40s in Mecca, and at the age of 50 found himself in a situation where he was forced to flee and settle in Medina. We will talk about this situation from an angle that will inspire you to change yourself for the better.

Key events in Muhammad's life

To quickly review the key events in Muhammad's life in his 40, some of which we already discussed:



Age 43: Muhammad finished training at Al-Arqam house.



Age 45: The first wave of Muslims moved to Ethiopia.



Age 46: The second wave of Muslims moved to Ethiopia.



Ages 47 to 50: Muhammad and his extended family become increasingly excluded from mainstream Meccan society.

Conflict

The relationship between the Prophet and the town's anti-change establishment hit a dead end, and the existing leaders (specifically about 40 people in the Meccan elite) decided to cut ties with Muhammad and all of the Hashemites (his extended family), meaning not dealing with them in commerce combined with refusing to marry anyone from their families.

In modern terms, this meant social isolation and economic sanctions, because life in Mecca did not allow anyone to live isolated from the rest of society. As a result, the Hashemites went through over 1,000 days of famine, which would have lasted longer if one of the Meccan leaders, Hesham ibn Amr, had not felt regret about the worsening humanitarian situation and led a change movement to end the sanctions.

How was he able to do this on his own?

Change through connecting

Seeing the worsening condition of those under economic siege, Hesham chose not to remain silent. He went to another local leader, named Zuhair, to discuss the situation and found that he, too, was not comfortable with what was happening, but wanted to find others equally opposed before speaking up.

Hesham went to Al-Mit'im, who expressed a similar opinion and said he would rather there be a fourth person with them.

Hesham found Abu Al-Bahtari, and Abu Al-Bahtari asked Hesham to look for a fifth person, and in the end they were a group of six leading the movement for change and successfully ended the boycott.

Note that Hesham did not actually persuade anyone to change their minds, because they were already convinced, but he acted as a connector between them, much as Abu Bakr was a connector between the first converts to Islam.

The components of change

The components of a movement successfully bringing about change are: an inspiring idea; charismatic leadership; and dedicated followers.

There are a billion internet users, mostly connected by social media such as Facebook and Twitter, who can unify behind an idea and be inspired by change.

In his influential book, *Tribes*, Seth Godin describes how change usually happens:

*A movement [for change] happens when people talk to one another, when ideas spread within the community, and most of all, when peer support leads people to do what they always knew was the right thing.*²³

Migration

Muhammad's situation did not improve with the end of the boycott, however, and actually got worse, due to his uncle Abu Talib dying at the age of 86 and his wife Khadija in the same year.

With Muhammad's political protector gone, his powerful opponents in Mecca stepped up their harassment campaign.

Muhammad himself recalled, "The Quraysh couldn't do anything hateful to me until Abu Talib died."

Muhammad left Mecca at the age of 53, spending the last 10 years of his life in Medina. The next and final chapter will talk about Muhammad's life in Medina and the movement for change he led in the Arabian Peninsula.

We are at the end of the chapter on Muhammad in his 40s. The goal was to motivate you to create change, offering the inspiring example of Muhammad and some of his friends.

We saw the turning points in his life, starting with the divine revelation in the Hira cave and finishing with the migration to Medina, suggesting how you can benefit from these turning points while you are trying to instigate change for the better, or to improve

yourself.

We also looked at incentives for change: emotional and rational interaction; flexibility in adapting to change; desire for a new life; busily thinking about how to develop oneself; and the importance of training to acquire skills that could help you successfully bring about change.

The reality of our constantly changing 21st century world has made change a buzzword. But it is absolutely true that one must be able to move quickly to keep up with and adapt to change.

How can we learn from Muhammad in his 40s?

(Note: Here we were flexible in interpreting his 40s, since we mean a life stage — that of full maturity — not just a number or birth date, and in our case this life stage can vary from person to person.)

Muhammad in his 40s	Your stage of maturity
Muhammad was in sharp pain when the angel Gabriel squeezed him in the cave, yet yearned to see him again, and was upset when a long time passed without doing so.	Bear the pain of change, because it is the test of fire that will take you to a higher level.
Muhammad trained himself and his friends in Al-Arqam's house to handle the challenges of change.	If you want to successfully survive the 21st century, you must learn. But if you want to thrive, you must learn, train and practice.
Muhammad changed his environment, left Mecca and settled in Medina.	Change your environment if it is holding you back. Your environment could be either your physical place or your condition

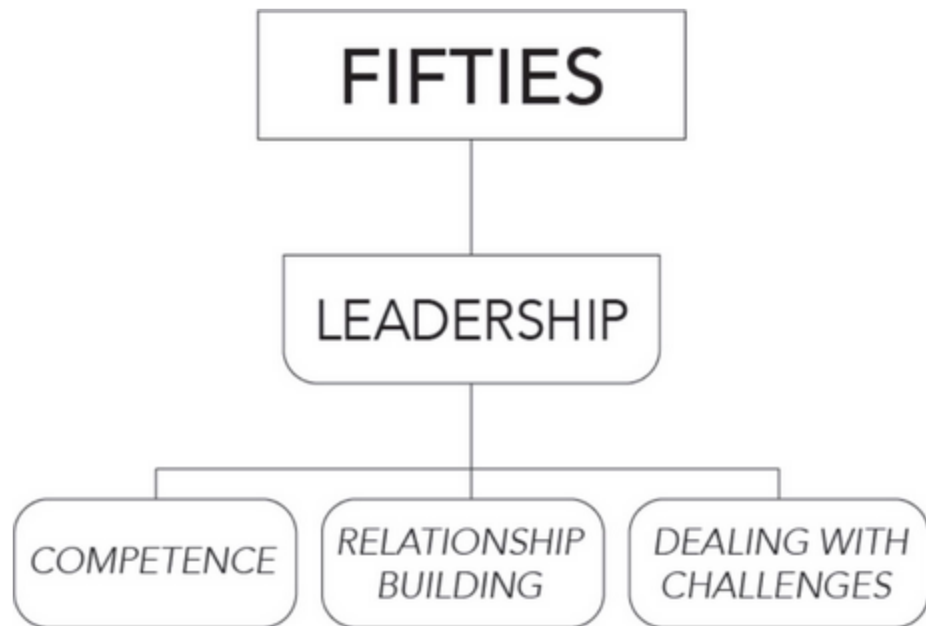
¹⁹ A book I highly recommend on this concept is *Superconnect: Harnessing the Power of Networks and the Strength of Weak Links*, by Richard Koch and Greg Lockwood.

²⁰ *Switch: How to Change Things When Change is Hard* by Chip Heath and Dan Heath.

²¹ See: Rayan, M. *Adaptability: How to Survive Change You Didn't Ask for*.

²² Lucas, 39.

²³ Godin, p. 22.



In brief

Leading successful change requires successful leadership, and successful leadership is getting people to do things they didn't want to before, or didn't expect they could. Leaders take risks, seek opportunities, provide something to believe in, and inspire achievement. When Muhammad arrived in Medina, he redefined the role of the city, built new relationships and gave people a vision to believe in. Although there are natural born leaders, leadership can be learned and applied, even at lower levels of responsibility.

Chapter 7

Muhammad in his 50s

Leadership skills

Muhammad fled Mecca at the age of 53 and lived in Medina as the town's leader for the 10 remaining years of his life.

If the 40s are a time of change, then the 50s are a stage of exerting guidance and leadership.

Some believe that leadership is a word that can only be applied to political affairs. But actually it can mean taking responsibility for others at any level. It could mean your family, your students, your employees, or anyone you feel responsible for helping to improve their lives.

Part of leadership is natural born, but like any other skill, anyone can acquire it with training and practice. Leadership does not know any set age, but rather depends on the person's readiness and the nature of her responsibility.

We will look at how Muhammad was a leader in times of war and peace, and the attributes that enabled him to deal with each person according to his or her personality and culture.

The goal of this chapter is not simply to narrate the events in Medina, which are already told in traditional biographies of the Prophet in great detail, but rather to illustrate how you can be inspired by Muhammad's life in Medina to be a leader within your family, your

job, or any other responsibility, even if it means just being responsible for yourself.

Medina

First we will take a look at Medina and its people, and how Muhammad led the development process for both.

Medina, in the west of what is today Saudi Arabia, nestled between two hills, Mount Uhud to the north and Mount Ayr to the south, is a verdant oasis of palm trees thanks to its fertile soil, plentiful groundwater, and rainwater courses through *wadis*, or low-lying valleys, which become seasonal riverbeds.

Medina was formerly known as Yathrib, and is some 400 kilometers from Mecca. Medina did not have the same religious status as Mecca before Islam, and so was not off-limits to tribal fighting. Nor was it a commercial center, as it did not lie on the caravan route.

Medina did not have much political power to speak of. Or a central prison or police force, even though it was geographically larger than Mecca. Instead, each neighborhood of Medina had its own citadel

separating and protecting it from its neighbors.

And so Medina was distinctive for having around 78 separate citadels.

How did the Prophet Muhammad deal with this unstable situation that lacked a sense of security?

In a word, he led a process of changing it for the better.

In this chapter, we explore the Prophet's new environment, which he studied carefully before implementing his reforms — just as any good leader must thoroughly assess a situation before aspiring to bring about change.

We will look at some of the reforms Muhammad introduced in Medina; how he improved relations between people by basing them on trust and shared responsibility for achieving security, regardless of an individual's religion or personal convictions.

We will also look at the challenges to his leadership, and how Muhammad dealt with troublemakers who opposed his leadership. We will draw a range of lessons from Muhammad's actions in the

three major battles against the Meccans (Badr, Uhud, and the Battle of the Trench), looking at how Muhammad managed to steadily expand his influence until he captured Mecca one year before his passing away at the age of 63.²⁴

Competent leadership

Muhammad created a new reality on the ground after arriving into Yathrib (later renamed Medina) in June 622.

He quickly set to work improving his new town, deliberately taking measures that would benefit the entire population, regardless of religious affiliation.

For example, he declared Yathrib to be a sacred city, off-limits to fighting, like Mecca already had been, and made the town's residents responsible for their own collective security.

According to a Hadith, the Prophet said: "I have made Medina *haram*, just as Abraham made Mecca *haram*."

The population of Medina was content with his leadership, even

though — believe it or not — the majority was actually non-Muslim and did not consider Muhammad a prophet.

Muhammad's rule over Medina was by rule of law, not religiously inspired rule as a prophet.

The importance of the majority of the population accepting him as their leader should not be underestimated, because it was unprecedented for Medina — long divided along tribal lines — to agree to a single leader and more centralized authority, much less an outsider.

Each tribe within the oasis of Medina was living in its own in a village, separated from the neighboring village, whether by fortifications, farmland, or empty land, and each village had its own sheikh responsible for its affairs.

This division, along with the fact that each village was heavily armed, meant constant tribal warfare or the threat thereof, a situation that had brought the population to the point where it was ready for a radical solution (centralized authority and a unified leadership to end the conflict).

The basis of real leadership

The population of Yathrib/Medina accepted Muhammad's leadership, as his good reputation had preceded his arrival. They did so out of respect for his competence, not out of fear or compulsion.

Let Muhammad inspire you to base your leadership on others' trust in your competence and respect for you, because that is what will ensure their cooperation with you, particularly during tough times.

The Prophet built a 60-meter by 60-meter mosque in the center of Medina and a place for him to live with his family (he remarried after Khadija's death).

He helped build the mosque with his own hands alongside the early Muslims who had come with him from Mecca to Medina. Many of these Muslim migrants were merchants by profession, who would have been used to delegating construction work to slaves or poor workers, so the Prophet helping do the grunt work of building the mosque would have set quite an example.

The Muslims gathered in the mosque for communal prayers, especially after the *adhan* (call to prayer) began being announced

some six months after their arrival.

Islamic prayers were initially performed in the direction of Jerusalem, but after the Jewish tribes in Medina broke with Muhammad and rejected him as a prophet, continuing the Judeo-Christian message, the *qiblah* (direction of prayer) was changed to Mecca. The Muslims also began fasting in the month of Ramadan at the start of their second year in Medina.

The Muslim migrants mostly would have seen themselves as too good to get their hands dirty if they hadn't been inspired by seeing Muhammad pitching in to build the mosque in Medina, whereupon they said: "This is wrong to sit here while the Prophet is working."

True leadership does not mean power, but rather setting an example for others to follow. As John Adair said in *The Leadership of Muhammad*:

By sharing in the labors, dangers and hardships of his people, Muhammad exemplified a universal principle of good leadership. It's what — deep down — people expect

*of their leaders, and when it doesn't happen it always produces adverse comment.*²⁵

The people of Medina

We do not know exactly what the population of Medina was at the time, but we know that the population lived in tribal clusters, with each clan living in an autonomous area protecting itself from the attacks of other clans. There were two main components of Medina's population, other than the Arab tribes:

- The Jews: Over 20 Jewish tribes lived in the town, some of them being of Arab origins from the Levant. Many of them were skilled metal smiths, tanners, or else were farmers concentrated in the oasis's agricultural villages.
- The Muslim migrants: Of the Arabs who emigrated from Mecca, or came from Ethiopia, some lived in the mosque or in the houses of Medina's Muslim

converts until they settled down in separate residential areas. The first wave of Muslims numbered around 60 people, whose numbers swelled with the following waves of migration from Mecca and surrounding areas.

Changing relationships

Muhammad transformed people's relationships with one another, paving the way for a relationship built on citizenship and trust, instead of the hostility and suspicion that had been prevalent.

He did this by drafting what has become known as the Medina Constitution. The constitution was written in the language of its age, and some of it is difficult for even native Arabic speakers today to understand. But even though the vocabulary in its 52 articles may be antiquated, the idea of a written social contract was revolutionary for its time and is still meaningful today.

In it, Muhammad proclaimed the city's population to be "a single nation," made Medina into a holy city like Mecca, off-limits to fighting, like Mecca, making the entire population responsible for

Medina's security, and guaranteed freedom of belief for all.

In *Leadership and the New Science*, Margaret Wheatley argues that while traditional leaders focus on roles and responsibilities, new leaders build human relationships that become the real energy for success.²⁶

The Medina Constitution was crucial not only for the text in its articles, but also for the inclusive relationships that were established between the people of Medina afterwards.

Rules and regulations alone do not create a successful state, company, or family. Every resident needed to feel a sense of belonging to an entity larger than her tribe, and Muhammad recognized and fulfilled this need, ensuring acceptance of his rule from even the non-Muslim majority in Medina.

Leading change

Muhammad introduced sweeping changes in Medina: he established a centralized authority, enhanced security, and drained the swamps that had been a breeding ground for malaria, where he then built

housing for migrant families who had previously been sleeping in the mosque or staying temporarily with other families.

After the Battle of Badr highlighted the importance of horses in the war with Mecca, Muhammad set aside land for horse races, and encouraged people to buy horses.

He also promoted education and the fight against illiteracy, releasing prisoners of war who taught children from Medina how to read and write.

How do you lead change?



First, create a need for change. Ideally, 75 percent of your audience should be convinced of the importance of change.



Constant infighting among Medina's population had created a pressing need for them to live in peace, and they were happy with Muhammad's reforms because they had already been believers beforehand in the importance of achieving security.



Express your vision for change clearly and consistently. This is so people will understand exactly what you want, as if they see it laid out before them.



Muhammad described his vision of a secure future Medina when he said, "I have made Medina off-limits just as Abraham made Mecca

off-limits."



Listeners would have imagined their town being safe, like they knew Mecca to be.



Work with those who are convinced in change, as they may include high-ranking officials and other influential people.



Muhammad sought supporters from within Medina's leadership who would back his plan to challenge the Quraysh in Badr, winning over people like Saad ibn Muadh, an important tribal leader who threw his support behind Muhammad.

Leadership challenges

Leaders constantly face challenges, such as dealing with difficult people, troublemakers, or those who drag their feet against change.

The Prophet faced trouble within Medina from two main groups: those whom I will call “troublemakers” — an otherwise disparate group who felt their interests were threatened — and “dissenters” who coalesced around the Jewish tribe of Qaynuqa.

We will look at how Muhammad handled both challenges to his leadership, to see how this can inspire you to deal with opponents.

Troublemakers

Some did resist the change the Prophet was trying to implement, because he threatened their interests and the status quo to which they were accustomed.

They stirred up trouble against Muhammad’s leadership, creating unrest and weakening the centralized authority by building a rival mosque to the Medina mosque, which became known as Al-Dirar

mosque.

They did not represent a specific tribe or any set political or religious point of view, but rather were a collection of individuals opposed to change for their own disparate reasons, and whom the Qur’an calls “hypocrites.”

We do not know their numbers or whether they disproportionately belonged to a particular demographic group. Their most famous leader was Abdullah ibn Ubayy, who reluctantly converted to Islam after the Battle of Badr.

The Prophet used different strategies to deal with the troublemakers, each according to the person’s personality and the nature of the problem raised: sometimes entering into dialogue with him, other times ignoring him, and on occasion expelling someone from Medina.

Dissenters

Others challenged the Medina Constitution and threatened Medina’s security, such as the Qaynuqa, a relatively prosperous tribe that

dominated the gold market in Medina.

After Muhammad returned victorious from the Battle of Badr, he warned the Qaynuqa of the consequences of violating the Medina Constitution, to which a Qaynuqa leader defiantly retorted: “You have faced people [the Meccans] that don’t know how to fight. If you fight us, you’re going to learn that we do.”

The Qaynuqa were upset at Muhammad’s move to ban usury — much like modern-day pawn shops, the gold merchants of Medina profited from being the high-interest lender of last resort for desperate borrowers.

Their niche was threatened by the Muslims creating a usury-free market.

A conflict flared after some men in Qaynuqa sexually harassed a Muslim woman, and a Muslim man was beaten to death shortly thereafter.

The tribe of Qaynuqa refused to pay blood money to the slain man’s family, and Muhammad mobilized his forces to expel the tribe from Medina, rather than have it remain as a constant threat to local

security.

Conflict management

There is a difference between leadership and management. Leadership is a certain vision, whereas management is supervising the achievement of this vision.

Muhammad demonstrated leadership and management skills together, meaning he put a vision forward and then contributed to implementing it. Muhammad trained others in leadership and management — for instance, appointing those who led military campaigns or become responsible for Medina and run its affairs in his absence.

We will learn about other examples of Muhammad’s leadership and how he managed the conflict with the Quraysh in the battles of Badr, Uhud, and the Trench.

The goal is not to delve into the details of the military campaign, but rather to see Muhammad’s ideas and practices, which showed leadership in the face of adversity.

Let's start with Badr.

The Battle of Badr

War was always a terrible evil, but it was sometimes necessary in order to preserve decent values, such as freedom of worship.^{[27](#)}

Muhammad first expanded his influence in the Hejaz region running along Saudi Arabia's Red Sea coastline by signing a series of friendship agreements with other tribes, particularly those between Medina's outskirts and the coast.

The goal of this was clear: to neutralize the tribes in the area through which the Meccans' caravans passed, ensuring these tribes would stay out of the fight. Muhammad was able to disrupt the Quraysh's vital trade connections, forcing costly reroutes.

In one such incident, Muhammad blocked the path of a huge Meccan caravan with 2,000 camels carrying imported goods from Syria worth some 50,000 dinars, forcing the Meccans to change course

when they learned Muhammad's forces were on the way.

This set off a furor in Mecca, with one faction arguing successfully for a punitive military campaign against Medina. The Meccans sent an expedition of 1,000 soldiers and 700 camels, while Muhammad did not expect matters to escalate into an all-out war and was caught off-guard, mobilizing only 300 fighters with 70 camels.

The number of fighters and their equipment and animals were crucial in the wars of this age, and the Muslims had only two horses (much more effective in fast attacks than camels) in their army, whereas the Meccans had 100 horses.

In other words, the Muslims were outgunned by the Meccans.

So how did Muhammad deal with the situation?

In the Battle of Badr, Muhammad arranged his soldiers in a creative formation, putting them in a Z shape with two parallel lines of soldiers with their backs to each other, linked by a diagonal row of soldiers in the middle.^{[28](#)}

This stopped the enemy from being able to outflank the Muslim

fighters from any direction.

Muhammad also positioned his forces to control the few sources where accumulated rainwater could provide drinking water.

He then supervised the fight from high ground to be able to monitor the situation and give orders.

To everyone's surprise, the battle ended with the Muslims victorious as 70 Meccans were killed and another 70 were captured.

Mount Uhud

One year after the Battle of Badr, the Meccans and the Muslims clashed again. This time the Meccans had mobilized a larger army, with 3,000 fighters, 3,000 camels, and 200 horses, and also brought along women to cheer them on in battle.

The Meccan army approached Medina from the south, but found the volcanic rocks there slowed its camels, and so it swung around to the north of Medina, to a place called Mount Uhud.

The highest mountain near Medina, rising some 1,000 meters above sea level, three kilometers across, and lying only four kilometers from the Prophet's mosque and house in the town center, the Muslims set up a position with their backs to Mount Uhud, where they could not be flanked unless the Meccans took a specific 700-meter high hill, which the Prophet fortified with 50 soldiers under strict orders to not leave their outpost under any circumstance.

The Muslims' army was made up of 700 soldiers ordered by Muhammad to fight as units, not as individuals, because facing a Meccan army four times their size the Muslims would be wiped out in a battle based on individual combat.

The two armies came face to face and the Muslims took the early advantage. However, the 50 fighters on the critical hill outpost thought the battle was won and abandoned their position to go claim the spoils of war from the retreating Meccans.

With the hill unguarded, the Meccans regrouped and outflanked the Muslim army, defeating it.

Lessons in leadership I

- Forgive: Educating or raising someone takes time, and you might see better results if you know when to forgive a mistake.

Muhammad reprimanded the hill outpost guards, but did not put all blame on them.

Likewise, do not be overly harsh with your children or employees who make mistakes.

As Secretan puts it, "Being right serves the ego, but being kind serves the soul."²⁹

The Qur'an says: "you were lenient with them. And if you had been rude [in speech] and harsh in heart,

they would have disbanded from about you. So pardon them and ask forgiveness for them and consult them in the matter" (3:159).

- Be well informed: It will be hard for you as a leader to gain others' respect if you are not skilled or knowledgeable enough about your role.³⁰

Muhammad sent 70 fighters to watch the Meccan army. He gave them a sign: if the Meccans were riding horses, then they were about to attack Medina (horses were used for high speed, short distance movements) and if they were riding camels, they would be returning to Mecca (camels were far better for long treks).

- Focus: Influential leaders have the ability to stay calm and levelheaded, however tough the going gets.

Don't let a difficult situation overwhelm you and lead you to a poor decision.

Muhammad was injured during the fighting, and his forces took heavy losses with 70 killed. He kept his cool, however, and focused on the challenge of the moment, regrouping his beleaguered troops for a 20-kilometer march in hostile territory.

The Battle of the Trench

The Battle of the Trench was the third and final decisive battle waged between the Meccans and Muhammad.

Two years after the Battle of Uhud, the Meccans launched a military campaign, and this time they were determined to take Medina itself. They had as many as 10,000 soldiers, including non-Meccan mercenaries.

When he learned the Meccan army was marching on Medina, Muhammad quickly mobilized some 3,000 fighters and sent

Medina's children and other non-combatants to safety within fortresses. Medina was naturally defensible on most sides, with trees and volcanic rocks blocking cavalry from riding in.

The northern entrance to Medina was exposed, however, so Muhammad decided to defend it with a trench.

The idea of digging trenches had spread during the seemingly endless fighting between the Byzantines and the Persians, and was used as a defensive tactic to defend cities from surprise attacks by the enemy.

Much later, trench warfare became a defining feature of World War I in Europe.

The Arabs, however, had never seen trenches in their warfare until a follower of Muhammad, Salman the Persian, proposed the idea.

Muhammad agreed to the suggestion and the Muslims dug a seven-meter wide and three-meter deep trench stretching three kilometers in length.

Lessons in leadership II

- Be decisive: Digging the trench was backbreaking labor, especially since time was not on the Medinans' side. The weather was cold (March), but Muhammad pushed ahead with the trench plan.

Be firm in your decisions, and do not let an opportunity slip away out of indecisiveness. You may have many options, but little time. Gather information, put a timetable in place, do a gut check to see if your instincts agree with your decision, and put your reliance in God.

- Motivate: "Leaders who smile and joke in the face of such odds release the tension in their soldiers; they radiate confidence."³¹

Indeed, the work of digging the trench was not appealing to most people in Medina. Arabs take pride in combat out in the open and would have disdained the dreary work of digging a trench.

Muhammad motivated the Medinans throughout, and they finished digging three kilometers of trenches in only six days.

- Get involved: Muhammad asked every group of 10 to dig 30 meters of trench, and joined in the work.

According to a Hadith narrated by Al-Bukhari, an eyewitness said: "I saw him carrying dirt from the trench, and the dirt even covered him up to his stomach." Join in with what your children are doing, and help lighten the load of your employees in their job.

- Encourage creativity: Salman the Persian would not have spoken up to propose digging a trench if the Prophet had not fostered an environment of freedom of thought and expression.

No one derided Salman's idea, as foreign as it must have seemed. On the contrary, his proposal was received enthusiastically, seriously debated for its merits and drawbacks, and finally adopted.

Instead of being ridiculed, Salman was praised by the Prophet and others for his creative solution. In order to encourage creativity within your environment, start by developing the strengths of a proposal instead of focusing on the weaknesses. Salman came in with a unique skillset, having been a veteran of the Byzantine-Persian wars, which was his strength.

The Siege

The Meccan army was caught off-guard to find a formidable trench blocking its path, and was unsure what to do. The Muslims had used the dirt removed from the trench to build a mound, and were on top of it to stop the Meccans from crossing.

With the two armies within sight of one another, the Meccans were taunting the Muslims, trying to provoke them to come out and fight. ("You're fighting from behind a hole? Did our ancestors dig trenches and hide between them, afraid to fight? You're not Arabs or warriors!").

The Muslims responded to the taunts at times. The Meccans tried to find another way into Medina, negotiating with the Jewish tribes controlling the Western entrance, but with no luck.

With soldiers' morale low due to short supplies and an unusually cold sandstorm, the army retreated after a month-long siege, returning to Mecca without an actual battle occurring.

Peace

Some biographies of Muhammad, both by Muslim and non-Muslim authors, have focused heavily on war. But war occupied only a brief part of the Prophet's life.

Muhammad lived a normal family life with his children and grandchildren, and was widely loved for this simplicity and his approachability.

Even when Muhammad did use war, it was only as a last resort and for the purpose of bringing peace, as when he made peace with the Meccans one year after the Battle of the Trench.

The Quraysh were surprised when Muhammad headed for Mecca for the Umra pilgrimage, and did not know what to do. They could not prevent anyone from visiting the Kaaba, and at the same time certainly were not eager to let him enter.

The Quraysh decided to block his path before he made it to the Kaaba, which would have put them in a bind. Muhammad changed course, going to Hudaiba 11 kilometers west of Mecca, and waited to see what would happen.

The Quraysh thought that Muhammad had come to capture Mecca, not for the Umra pilgrimage, a claim he denied.

The Prophet and his companions asserted that they were not armed for war, carrying only light weapons for self-defense while traveling, and would not carry these into the Haram around the Kaaba.

The Quraysh envoys sent to Hudaiba returned convinced that Muhammad and his companions had the right to enter Mecca for the Umra pilgrimage.

Muhammad used different methods to convince the Quraysh that he had come in peace for the pilgrimage, not in war. Some of these methods we can see today in literature on negotiation and persuasion strategies, such as understanding the nature of the person you are trying to convince.

Muhammad knew that one of the envoys (chief of the Ahabish tribe) cared deeply about offering sacrifices to God, and when Muhammad saw him coming as a negotiator, he highlighted the sheep and other sacrifices he had brought with him for the pilgrimage.

The envoy was moved, and when he returned to Mecca pressed for

allowing the Muslims to complete the pilgrimage in peace.

How do you persuade others?



Know your audience: Find out what you can about your interlocutor (his or her social background, education, and interests) and try to determine what might be influential in getting across your idea, whether it is an intellectual point, an emotional argument, or an appeal to his or her prior convictions, etc.

Muhammad used his knowledge of the Meccan envoys' personalities to his advantage. Knowing how much the Ahabish respected pilgrims to the Kaaba, he was able to show evidence he had come for the pilgrimage.



Build up your credibility: Your words count for seven percent of the impression you make on people, but behavior accounts for 53 percent.

In the Hdayba, Muhammad pardoned and released 40 Meccan soldiers who had attacked him. This move embarrassed the Quraysh, because under Arab traditions prisoners of war were only released in exchange for ransom.

Actions speak louder than words.



Know how to market your ideas: Muhammad's method was different with different envoys, but his message was clearly defined and constant: "We did not come to fight, we came to

circumambulate [the Kaaba].”

This message would have resonated with the Quraysh, who knew war would hurt Mecca’s stability, whereas the visit of 1,400 pilgrims would be economically beneficial.

The end of the war

The negotiations between Muhammad and the Meccans resulted in the Quraysh agreeing to allow Muhammad to perform the pilgrimage, but in the following year, ending the decade-long hostilities between the two sides.

The Muslims saw the agreement as unfair, because they had prepared for the pilgrimage and did not want to accept a delay, and also because the agreement compelled them to return Muslims who had recently defected from Mecca without requiring the Quraysh to return anyone who had defected from Medina.

But in the end, the Muslims accepted the agreement, because

Muhammad saw it as being in their broader interests. The challenge here was not just to see matters from a different perspective, but also to persuade opposition in his own ranks of his point of view.

So how did Muhammad convince the other Muslims to accept the peace deal at Hudaib, and how can you learn from this to become more persuasive in convincing others?

How can you convince an opponent?



Listen: In his book Inspire: What Great Leaders Do, Baldoni argues that allowing people to voice their opposition is critical.

It is not simply a matter of venting; it is an acknowledgement of real opposition (Baldoni, 108-09).

Muhammad gave his companions a chance to express their frustration, without interruption, reprimand or judgment.



Don't clash: convince through persuasion rather than coercion. Muhammad asked his companions to offer their sacrificial animals and shave their heads (part of the pilgrimage rituals). When they didn't, he did so himself, and they followed suit. He changed their minds by persuasion, not by forcing them to accept his point of view.

Entering Mecca

Muhammad proved his detractors wrong by taking advantage of the truce to expand the Muslims' influence in the Hejaz area, cutting more deals with Medina's neighboring tribes, which were vital for ensuring the safety of the Quraysh caravans.

The truce agreement had specifically allowed other tribes the freedom to choose to ally with either Mecca or Medina, and most tribes along the Quraysh trade route picked Medina.

The following year, Muhammad entered Mecca, as stipulated in his agreement with the Quraysh, performing the pilgrimage with around 1,400 people and peacefully leaving after three days.

Expand your influence

In your life, you have two zones: your circle of influence and your circle of concern. Your circle of influence includes the things you control, while your circle of concern includes the things that matter to you but you do not control. [32](#)

The challenge is to expand your circle of influence until it can affect your circle of concern. Muhammad expanded his circle of influence by allying with the tribes in the Hejaz, which in turn impacted his circle of concern (Mecca) through the Quraysh's caravan traffic.

But after Muhammad's pilgrimage to Mecca, an outbreak of violence ended the truce when a pro-Quraysh tribe attacked another tribe

allied to the Muslims, with military aid from the Quraysh, which was forbidden under the agreement.

The Quraysh apologized for the incident, but Muhammad — unsure that this would not be repeated — rejected the apology and mobilized 10,000 soldiers for a military campaign.

When they saw the size of the army on the outskirts of Mecca, the Quraysh surrendered without a fight, and Muhammad took control of the city and announced a general amnesty, even though under the customs of the Arabian Peninsula at the time it would have been within his right to kill the men and enslave the women.

The end of Muhammad's life

Muhammad returned to Medina, where he received delegations from the major tribes in the Hejaz and dictated letters to political leaders in Persia, Syria, and Egypt, entreating them to embrace Islam.

He performed the Hajj pilgrimage with 140,000 people from Arabia in Mecca, delivering his final speech calling for justice and respect for women (“Do not do wrong ... consult women on what is right ... listen

to what I am saying and come to your senses.”). Finally, he returned once again to Medina.

Commenting on how moving Muhammad's speech must have been, in his *La vie de Mahomet* Constantin Gheorghiu wrote:

*Even though we are Europeans, and did not hear the Prophet's voice or live in his time and place, when we read this speech we are affected and moved by his words. So how must it have been for those who heard the speech in person that day? They would have never forgotten that awe-inspiring hour, because they were overwhelmed by the Prophet, and listened to him with their hearts and minds.*³³

Lessons from Muhammad's leadership?

Muhammad's leadership	Your leadership
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Muhammad quickly grasped the reality in Medina and changed its social condition for the better.	Understand your reality before changing it, in order to know what can or cannot be changed.
Muhammad joined in construction work some Muslim migrants looked down upon (e.g. when digging the trench)	Do not give orders from above, but rather set an example and join people in doing whatever you ask them to achieve.
Muhammad established relations between the people of Medina based on rights and duties, with everyone being responsible for the town's peace and security.	Do not focus only on the role and responsibility of the individuals whom you are leading, but also build human relations between them.
Muhammad would note mistakes but not go overboard in blaming the person who had made the mistake.	Be forgiving of mistakes and do not overdo trying to prove you are right in order to rebuke or humiliate someone.

Muhammad based his decisions on careful observation and precise information.	Be well informed of the latest information in your field, so that you can win others' respect for your cutting-edge leadership
Muhammad possessed the ability to persuade others (such as during his negotiations in the Hudaib in 628.	Get to know the nature of the person with whom you are negotiating: listen to her, and discuss her concerns

The Prophet's death

Muhammad in his final days felt his strength draining away, and began to pray while seated and walked only with the assistance of others.

Al-Abbas, Mohammad's uncle, commented on Muhammad's high fever and constant headache, saying: "I know well the faces of Abdul-Mutallib's descendants when they are dying."

In his final sermon at the mosque, Muhammad hinted that his days were numbered, and apologized to anyone whom he might have ever hurt: “Whoever’s back I lashed, that was my back. Whoever’s property I took, that was my property. Whoever’s honor I impugned, that was my honor.”

Muhammad passed away at the age of 63 after leading an extraordinarily inspirational life.

²⁴ Most of the information here about Muhammad in Medina is from the Arabic-language book *The State of the Prophet in Medina: A Study in its Making and Organization* by Salih Al-Ali.

²⁵ Adair, 77.

²⁶ Wheatley, pp. 49-60.

²⁷ Armstrong, p. 128.

²⁸ Gheorghiu, p. 219.

²⁹ Secertan, p. 143.

³⁰ See: James Scouller, *The Three Levels of Leadership*, pp.78-105.

³¹ Adair, p. 71.

³² On the circle of concern and circle of influence see, Stephen Covey’s *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, pp. 81-91.

³³ Gheorghiu, 376.

Conclusion

Your mission begins

We have reached the end of the book, and your mission is just beginning.

Being extraordinary is not related to a specific skill, because the times are changing quickly and so are the needed skills. This is even true of the basic skills mentioned in this book — emotional intelligence, a passion for learning, strengthening your influence, trustworthiness, and innovativeness — for leadership itself is constantly evolving.

Your mission is to not to stand idly by with these skills, but rather to actively practice them in order to gain or further develop them,

constantly upgrading your skillset to keep pace with the evolving needs of the age.

This requires two things from you:

First, continue to develop yourself in every meaning of the word. Attend training sessions, read self-development books, meet inspirational people, and surround yourself with people who support you.

Second, read about the Prophet's life, looking for how to develop yourself and look for life skills in Muhammad's interactions with others.

If you happen to be a devout Muslim and respond that you have already read the traditional biographies of the Prophet and will not find anything new there, you're right if you're looking only for a narrative retelling of events. But if it's about a different retelling of the same story, which sheds new light, then reading a single biography will not be enough. You must constantly read in search of further perspectives, because each age will rewrite Muhammad's biography from the perspective of its own interests and concerns.

We hope that this book has whetted your appetite to read more about inspirational examples from history and modern life. There are many to be found, and perhaps you yourself will one day set an example for future generations.

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